

August 13, 2017

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Letting Christ Do the Walking”

Matthew 14:22-33

We generally aren't speaking well of somebody when we say, “He thinks he can walk on water.” That phrase is usually reserved for somebody we think to be proud, arrogant and full of themselves—somebody who counts himself a cut above the norm.

Throughout the years as I've pondered this episode of Jesus walking on the water during this storm on the Sea of Galilee, I've always kind of seen Peter in a good light. Yeah, inevitably he doubts and starts sinking, but he's willing to step out of the boat, right? Nobody else has the guts, the faith, to do that.

But on closer examination, I think I may have been wrong about Peter. He really may be doing everything wrong from the get-go.

We all know this story. Jesus sends the disciples in the boat across the lake while he stays behind to dismiss the crowds and then goes off to pray by himself for a while. In the dark of the early morning He comes walking on the water to the boat and scares the stuffing out of the disciples who think he's some kind of ghost. So He calls out, “*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*”

How does Peter respond? “*Lord, if it is you...*” If it is you??!! Jesus just said “It is I!” Jesus is the only guy Peter has ever seen do great miracles and wonders. He just saw Jesus feed the 5000! Just before that he saw Jesus calm a tempest on this very same body of water. “Lord, if it is you...??!!” Who does he think it is; the Domino's Pizza delivery guy? C'mon! Peter knows it has to be Jesus.

But he says, “*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.*”

So I've got to wonder, is this faith, or is this Peter seeing Jesus doing the “God thing” that I preached about last week in walking on the water, and Peter saying, “That looks cool. I want to be doing the ‘God thing’ too! ‘Jesus, make this plan of mine happen’”? Is this faith, or is it Peter's prideful self-aggrandizing will asserting itself? I mean seriously; Peter thinks he can walk on water!

Jesus says, “Come” and Peter's plan actually works for a while, but the lake doesn't cooperate. The wind and waves freak Peter out and he fears and he sinks.

In desperation Peter does the smart thing, he yells “Lord, save me” to His Savior, and Jesus does the God thing of saving Peter. Jesus says, “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*”

I know why Peter doubted. Peter doubted because Peter can't walk on water! Peter's plan was never really focused on Christ. It was focused on Peter in the world and when the world seemed opposed to him, Peter doubted that Jesus could really see him through.

In the end, this episode doesn't glorify Peter. But it does glorify God. Peter's hubris is brought to nothing in his sinking while Jesus is exalted in the saving while walking on water—doing the God thing right.

Of course, Jesus continued doing the saving God thing to His suffering and death on the cross, then in His resurrection three days later, in the appearances to His disciples, His ascension to the Father and in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He continues doing His saving God thing today in Holy Baptism, the Holy Supper, the Holy Word of His Law and Gospel leading to repentance, forgiveness and true life forever.

Yet we still behave a lot like Peter. We believe in Jesus, and thus with eyes of faith we see Him coming to us doing the God thing. We say that's cool, but let me jump on board with plans and designs of my own. I'm not talking evil sinful stuff. I'm talking just the neat stuff of the world with which we're blessed. It might be our running a business, our traveling and enjoyment of life in retirement, our competing in sports or just our plans for growing up, finding a spouse and raising a family, whatever. But the problem comes in when we think it's about us and that Lord Jesus is supposed to be getting on board with our plan glorifying us in the world; that yeah, Jesus is Lord, but He's supposed to be putting me in control so I can kind of be doing the God thing over myself.

We can't walk on water. If we think everything is about us and what we're doing in the world, the world inevitably is going to have something nasty in store. The wind and the waves of a fallen world are always there. If they're not in your face, they're just around the corner. Heartbreak, injustice, sadness and sickness, loss and death are in the offing. The broken world will knock your legs out from under you and the consequences of your own sinful missteps will trip you up. You're going to sink.

So, there's several truths to be gathered from this lesson, and some of them kind of echo my sermons of the last couple weeks.

First and foremost; keep your eyes on Jesus! He is God. He walks on water, turns a meager meal into abundance, he calms the storms and commands the universe to do His bidding. He is the one who does the God things to create you, redeem you, and raise you from death to life forever. Keep focused on Him. Have faith in Him. Trust in Him and you will be saved!

Secondly, don't be jumping out of the boat to do your own thing in the face of His salvation. Our natural impulse in our fallen nature is to make everything all about us and what we can do in and grab of this short broken life. Jesus is constantly coming to you declaring "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid,*" reminding you that He is Lord of your life and that's a great and forever thing. Resist making yourself god unto yourself. It doesn't work. You can't walk on water. Trust in Jesus and look to His leading in all things.

Third, the scary wind and waves are going to come. Injury, decay and sickness assault everyone. All people are fallen so heartache, anger and malice will afflict even the best of your relationships and evil folks will mess with your life in terrible ways. Your own bad and awful sins will have consequences. But remember St. Paul's truth, "*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.*" Peter's sinking led to His cry of desperate faith, "Lord, save me." Trials and hardships that turn you in faith towards God's grace, are ultimately for your good. Do not despair, simply believe and put your hope in Christ.

And finally, just be yelling a lot, "Lord, save me." This brings forgiveness and comfort. The Lord we call upon has been through the suffering and death on our behalf and brings the faithful through His resurrection to eternal life beyond it. You can't walk on water. You can't even tread water. Apart from Christ, you sink. With Christ you're saved.

I know this is an echo from last week, but quite frankly, it bears repeating. Get over yourself and put your trust in what God has done and is doing in Jesus. He's the one who walks on water and he has walked up to you and called, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*" Truly, He is the Son of God—not a God far off, but God come to you and for you. Call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

Amen.

