



Pentecost 10-August 9, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 14:22-33

Lord, Save Me!

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is interesting to compare the different writing styles of the four gospel writers- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. After hearing the gospel reading for today and the frequent use of the word “immediately”, you might think Mark would have written what you just heard. In these few verses in the reading for today, three times you heard that something happened “immediately”. Mark uses this word more often in his writings than Matthew does, but Mark uses this word usually to signal the quick passage of time. The word “immediately” appears in the first chapter of Mark when Jesus was “immediately” led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mark skips over what other gospel writers consider important events such as Joseph and Mary dealing with the unexpected announcement that she would give birth to Jesus the son of God and the details of his the birth of Jesus and his early years. Mark speeds through the story of Jesus and begins his story when he was baptized, and Mark says “immediately” Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mark would be the writer who would comment after watching a fireworks display on the fourth of July, “immediately” students and teachers were back in school. We can easily relate to Mark’s style of writing and how quickly time passes.

In today’s scripture, Matthew uses the word “immediately” in a different way. He inserts the word “immediately” to remind his readers of the significance when one event happens immediately after another. The story of Jesus walking on the water and Peter sinking in the water happens “immediately” after Jesus feeds the multitude of thousands of people with two fish and five loaves of bread which we heard about last week. Before Jesus fed this large crowd of people, you may recall that he wanted to go to a deserted place to pray and mourn the death of John the Baptist. But now fast forward to this week, Jesus has not dismissed his plan to be alone, so he not only dismisses the well-fed crowd of people, but Jesus dismisses his disciples, so that he can now be alone. Completely alone. As soon as Jesus sent everyone away, we are told that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray.

One thing Matthew doesn’t describe Jesus doing “immediately” is calm the storm that the disciples were facing on the boat. Jesus went up on the mountain in the evening and didn’t respond quickly to the wave battered boat until the next morning. Matthew doesn’t tell us what the disciples were discussing as they were sent away by Jesus. We don’t know if they were still discussing the miracle that Jesus had performed by feeding the multitude of people and how they had gathered the leftovers. We don’t know if they were feeling a bit guilty when they recalled it was their plan to send the multitude away, but Jesus said, “You give them something to eat”. We don’t know if they started to feel guilty saying there was nothing to feed the crowd

when Jesus was right in front of them and had they had just witnessed Jesus cure every sickness that was brought to him. We don't know if these disciples in their retelling of what they saw started to convince each other that it was them that fed the crowd and forgot what Jesus had done with the 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread. We know how important details of stories can be changed or forgotten when they are told over and over. One thing we do know for sure is that Matthew records the disciples experienced fear immediately after losing sight of Jesus who they had just seen perform a miracle.

There is no mention that the disciples' greatest fear in this story was the wind and the storm. Wind on the Sea of Galilee is as common as wind is in the prairies of South Dakota. Some of these disciples were fishermen and were accustomed to what can happen on this sea and it often happened at night. But what frightened the disciples the most was they saw "someone" walking on the water. Their first instinct was not that it must be Jesus. In losing sight of Jesus, they had already forgotten the miraculous capabilities of Jesus. They had "immediately" forgotten Jesus and their thoughts led them to believe that the superpower walking on the water must be a ghost.

Now Matthew inserts the word "immediately" the second time. Matthew intentionally points out that Jesus "immediately" replaces the disciples' fear that they had just seen a ghost with faith that they had just seen Jesus. And Jesus doesn't do this by tossing a couple fish and five loaves into the boat to remind them of what he can do. Jesus puts the disciples' fear to rest by speaking to them. Jesus calms the fears of the disciples before he calms the wind as he walks on the water by saying "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Now we come to the part of the story that is pictured on your bulletin cover and is the painting on the altar in the Baltic Church. It is at this point our attention can quickly turn from Jesus and to what Peter says and does. It is at this point, I have heard Peter receiving praise for getting out of the boat and saying "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." But it is at this point Peter sounds more like Satan who told Jesus "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be turned into loaves of bread." Peter prefers to hear a command and see what he can do for Jesus instead of hearing a promise of what Jesus can do for him. Peter wants to see if he can succeed in doing the command that Jesus gives him.

Jesus knows the success rate of his disciples including you and me in "doing" commands. Jesus also knows it often is our preference to "try and try again" rather than confess we cannot do what Jesus has already done for us. So, Jesus doesn't encourage Peter to try harder to succeed in walking on the water. Jesus is not like a parent teaching a child to crawl or walk by moving away from them and coaxing them with words so they can get closer to the parent. Some of you may have participated in a pedal tractor pull with your children and coached them as the weight gets closer to them on the sled so you have to encourage them with confidence that they can do it if they just pedal harder. Jesus doesn't tell Peter to try harder or even to keep his focus on him instead of the wind. Jesus simply tells Peter, "Come". And Peter does **start** to walk on the water. But Jesus doesn't congratulate Peter for his few steps on the water like when you saw your child get up on water skis for the first time. Instead, as soon as Peter thought HE was walking on the water, he began to sink.

In a couple weeks, you will hear when Jesus speaks to Peter and says, "You are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church." I wonder if the first time Jesus thought of Peter as a rock was when he saw him sinking like

one in the Sea of Galilee. Before Peter got a swallow of sea water as he began to sing, Peter spoke three words of faith "Lord, Save Me". Peter's focus turned from himself and turned completely to Jesus.

These three words spring Jesus into quick action. Matthew uses the word "immediately" for the third time as Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus didn't offer his hand to see if Peter would decide to accept Jesus' help. Jesus didn't let Peter sink because of his lack of faith. When Peter said, "Lord, save me." Immediately, Peter was saved.

It may seem to you that since you last heard from Jesus that you have lost sight of him and it seems that immediately you have been sent into the stormy seas of this life. But like the disciples who had fears when they lost sight of Jesus, Jesus was still listening to their prayers. You have just heard again how Jesus removes fear. Jesus has not forgotten you even when you have not remembered him. You have not walked on water, but your sins have been drowned in the waters of your baptism and Jesus has reached out his hand to you and said, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Amen.