

Pentecost 10-August 13, 2023
Community Worship Service
Romans 10:5-15 and Matthew 14:22-33
From Doubt to Faith Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

The gospel reading for today featuring Jesus' walking on the water and Peter sinking into the water follows immediately after the familiar story of the miraculous feeding of the 5000. It is important to connect these two stories by what Jesus does at the beginning of this story. If you recall in the feeding of the 5000, it was the disciples who came up with the solution for having too many people to feed with too little food by sending the crowd of people away. Jesus' disciples came to him and told him to command the people away to go home. Jesus, of course did not go along with their idea and brought the people even closer to him. Jesus was attempting to teach his disciples how drawing the crowd closer to him would create faith by showing compassion for the crowd's needs rather than sending them home to fend for themselves.

As this story of Jesus walking on the water begins, one should not dismiss what Jesus does first. Jesus did to the disciples what the disciples wanted to do to the crowds of people that they wanted to avoid feeding. The reading that you just heard for today begins with Jesus MAKING his disciples get into a boat while he stayed behind to go up on the mountain to pray. Jesus' first attempt at getting some time alone in prayer after learning that his cousin John the Baptist had been killed was cut short by the crowds of people that followed him and he had compassion for. So, it is true that Jesus still wanted to not only get away from the crowds to pray, but Jesus may also have wanted to get away from his disciples and see how they responded to being separated not only from his physical presence, but also from hearing his voice.

The crowds that had been fed had now gone home and the disciples had left the shore and Jesus was finally alone. It was evening and it was getting dark. The darkness of night brings its own fear of not clearly seeing what is going on. But now these fishermen could not just rock themselves to sleep with the gentle splashing of waves against their boat. The wind was so great, that a fear began in these disciples, and they began to doubt their skills as fishermen of the sea.

The disciples were afraid, but they did nothing but row harder and get more tired from fearing that the storm would get worse. But it wasn't the waves beating against the boat that terrified these disciples. It was when they saw Jesus walking on the water. Granted, the disciples didn't know it was Jesus, but that was the very point that Jesus was about to make. A blurry sight of Jesus will only deliver fear. The only thing that would deliver them from fear to faith was to hear his voice. Before Jesus spoke, we are told that they all cried out in fear. It never occurred to not even one of these followers of Jesus who had just witnessed him feed 20,000 people with a boy's happy meal, that Jesus might also be able to walk on the water.

When Jesus heard their fears of believing that he was a ghost and not someone who could save them, Jesus did not leave them in their fears. Jesus never practiced what we call tough love. Instead, Jesus spoke and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." This is a clear word of promise from Jesus. A word that should remove any fears and worries that they once had. But Peter, who had just heard Jesus identify himself, answered Jesus as if he had asked a question. Peter turned Jesus' "It is I" into an "if it is you". Peter said the same words to Jesus that Satan said to Jesus when he tempted him in the wilderness. Satan had caused Peter to question who Jesus was as quickly as Jesus spoke to him. This is not an uncommon response from Peter who is often known as the disciple whose motto might be "Ready, fire, aim." But before we condemn Peter for his lack of faith, it might be good for each of us to recall times in our lives when we have so quickly forgotten who Jesus is and what he can do for us when storms of our lives seem to be stronger than Jesus' power to save us.

Peter wants to do something to confirm Jesus is who he says that he is rather than take him at his word. Peter commands Jesus to command him to walk on the water like Jesus had just done. Jesus obliges Peter's request and bids him "Come". Peter steps out of the boat in faith but begins to sink before he gets very far as he notices the wind instead of trusting what Jesus told him that he could do. Peter the rock begins to sink like one, but before his mouth goes under the water, Peter says the three words that Jesus waited for him to say. "Lord, save me." And Jesus does what Peter pleads him for him to do. Jesus reached out his hand and saved him. We can't hear the tone in Jesus' voice when he told Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" but I really don't imagine Jesus scolding Peter with these words as much as encouraging him to now have faith rather than doubt. After Jesus gets into the boat with Peter, it says that those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Peter was one of those who were in the boat who had been restored to faith.

We have recently just started watching the tv series "The Chosen". This series does a pretty good job portraying Peter as outspoken, trying to take the lead, but usually saying and doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. The character of Peter, however, is more likely a mirror image of you and me. There are days when our faith quickly turned to fear of the unknown. There are times when Jesus is coming closer to us, but we think it is a ghost rather than someone who has come to save us. But thanks be to God that our fears and doubts will not turn Jesus from coming to us and showing compassion. Jesus will keep coming closer despite our efforts to do things on our own.

You have come here today to get more than a glimpse of Jesus that will leave you wondering what Jesus can do for you. You have come here to be gripped by his word that saves. Our reading from Romans declares, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter knew who to call out to when he was drowning in the raging sea that was surrounding him and Jesus came close to him and saved him. Jesus still reaches out and saves you today. Amen