

The 10th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
August 9, 2020
PROPER 14

The Lessons: Job 38:4-18
 Psalm 18:1-6
 Romans 10:5-17
 Matthew 14:22-33

The Hymns: # 849 (1-3) "Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness"
 # 717 (1,*2,*3) "Eternal Father, Strong to Save"
 # 715 (1-3) "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me"

The Collect: Almighty and most merciful God, preserve us from all harm and danger that we, being ready in both body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish what You want done; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

The Sermon:
 Rocks on the Water
 Matthew 14:22-33

TEXT: *And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come."* **Matthew 14:28-29a**

Today's Gospel is perhaps one of the best known, most often told Bible stories of all time. But stories like this are often misinterpreted. Some preachers will tell you that what Peter did is what being a disciple is all about, doing extraordinary things – like speaking in tongues or healing the sick or casting out demons, or even, walking on water if only you have enough faith. That's what being a disciple is all about! Or is it?

If the purpose of this account was about disciples doing extraordinary things by faith like walking on water, it seems that Jesus would have summoned all the disciples out of the boat and had them all walking about on the water and safely to land. Or at the very least, after giving him a helping hand, Jesus would have sent Peter off to do it right without sinking.

But Jesus did neither. Instead, He rescued Peter from his own flailing efforts and helped him back to the boat.

My dear friends, as His baptized, forgiven and rescued children, God has placed you in the boat called the Church, along with Peter, the rest of the disciples, and every believer from Adam and Eve to the saints on earth today. Don't ever forget or take for granted this greatest of earthly blessings where Jesus brings heaven to earth and dwells with us to give us peace and comfort from the Father. While it is true that your going to church does not save you, that's not because church doesn't matter. It is because nothing you do can save you. Church is about what God does for you in Christ, the Rock of our Salvation. And so, it's also true that those whom God saves He saves only through the power of the Holy Spirit working in, with, and through His divine rescue boat, the holy Christian church.

So, do not make the mistake of Peter. The rescue and comfort is in the boat. That is the lesson of our Gospel today. Miraculous walking on water is for Jesus. Riding in the boat, rowing together through

rough seas and casting out nets to do some fishing is for us disciples.

Peter's trouble came before he ever stepped out of the boat. Listen carefully and see if you can tell where Peter's trouble starts:

But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart: it is I. Do not be afraid."

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

So He said, "Come."

And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Peter's trouble started with one little word, "If." *"If it is you, Lord, command me to come to You on the water."* The trouble starts in Peter's doubt that Jesus, the I AM Son of God is there. *"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Peter, you had a perfectly good boat. You had brothers in the faith to help row and weather the storm, and now Jesus, the Son of God Himself was coming out to be with you in their your of trouble. Why did you have to walk on the water?

Notice it was not an initial invitation from Jesus that bade Peter to walk to him. It was Peter's desire for another sign. "Jesus, if you are the Christ, prove it to me now by having me walk on the water." Peter was talking just like the Pharisees, making demands of Jesus according to his own desires.

So Peter was lost even before he ventured out of the boat:

- Lost in looking to his own faith rather than to the Lord right there in front of him - Peter just had to have more proof.

Lost in trying to prove something by his own works - Peter just had to do something.

- Lost in his own enthusiasm - Peter just had to show how excited he was to see Jesus.
- Lost from his own vocation - Peter just had to do something other than what he was given to do, captain the boat.

So, Jesus invites Peter to do what he must, what he has insisted on doing himself. And it goes swimmingly at first, because the Word of God, is powerful. What He bids and commands us to do, He accomplishes. That is what God's Word does, what God's Word has done since Genesis and the beginning of creation. By the Word of God were all things made that have been made [John 1:3]; by the Word of God all sin, death, and the power of the devil have been defeated -- for you and all men "it is finished!" salvation is won and given to you by the Word; and by that powerful Word of God Peter **did** walk on the water . . . until . . .

the one Jesus had named the Rock did what all rocks do when on water - he started to sink. He didn't

belong walking on water, he belonged in the boat. The boat was designed to stay afloat, Peter was not. The boat, under the watchful eye and in the protective presence of the Christ, the Son of the living God, would get them where they were going - and on the way perhaps they would even catch some fish as well.

Clearly, Jesus was coming to be with them on the boat. But Peter, the Rock, just couldn't wait. So Jesus gives him what he asks for. Remember that little bit of wisdom your grandma or grandpa might have taught you, "be careful what you wish for, you just might get it."? And Jesus makes it happen. He bids the sea to hold the weight of that beloved Rock of His.

So, if Jesus is there bidding Peter on, what goes wrong? Well Peter is like the one *"who received the seed on [rocky] places, . . . hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."*

So now with Peter sinking fast, flailing about in his own enthusiastic, if wrong-headed efforts, Jesus does what I Am, the Son of God, does -- He saves Peter. He saves the rock from drowning. But even more, He saves Peter from himself. He saves Peter from his temporary lack of faith and reliance on the Christ. He saves Peter from his own work. He saves Peter from his own enthusiasm. And he saves Peter from being something he was never meant to be.

And how does Jesus save Peter? He stretches out His hand, and catches Peter - and takes Him back into the boat. And in the boat, together, the disciples worship the Son of God.

That is how church works. Or better stated, that is how Jesus works by means of the church. Jesus has designed this blessed institution, this sacred craft called church, to keep you afloat even in the troubled, contentious, boisterous seas of this world. The boat is what Jesus has given and sent to get you where you are going - heaven -- because Jesus is in the boat with you and heaven is where He resides, forever at the right hand of the Father. And along the way, like those fishers of men before us, while in the boat we get to catch some fish too.

But also like Peter before us, there are times we just have to have more, more proof, more of our own work, more of our own enthusiasm. It is not enough for us to be in the boat worshiping, fishing and weathering the storm, we want to walk on water, we want to conquer the storm. Lord, if it is you, can't you make me do something spectacular? Look how excited I am to see you! I am tired of doing the same old thing. Let me do something special, something fantastic!

And indeed, Jesus may let us do our thing for a while, like He did with Peter, saying, "Walk on water if you must. See for yourself." Why? Why does he let Peter and us rocks walk on water when inevitably we are bound to flail away and sink? Because it is only then that we can see Jesus to be what He is - the great I AM who saves His people. When we start sinking and have lost all hope of saving ourselves, our Savior stretches out His hand and sends out the Holy Spirit who catches us and takes us back to the boat. And here in the boat we worship, rejoicing that here truly is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Small Catechism Explanation of the Third Article of the Creed states very well this lesson that Jesus teaches Peter and the other disciples in the boat.

"I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on

earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

We all know someone who has left the boat and is out there trying to walk on water. In fact we were once out trying to walk on water ourselves -- and may indeed try it again some day, whether because of disgust with the actions of the sinners and hypocrites we must ride along with, or simply because we don't think it as enjoyable, urgent, or worth our time as other things we could be doing. But when we inevitably succumb to the gravity of our sin and begin sinking fast like the rocks we are, the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, rescues us by our baptism that places us into His boat called church, and stretches out His hand through those He has placed in the boat before us.

And now, it is for us who remain in the boat to stretch out our hands, cast out the nets our Lord has given us and bring the flailing, sinking people that remain out there in the stormy world into the boat with us. We don't have to walk on water - in fact we dare not. For like Peter, and rocks, if and when we do we are sure to sink as well.

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt? Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid." These are Jesus words for you today and everyday. For He came not just to walk on water, and certainly not to make you walk on water - it is not necessary. He came to walk to the cross bearing all of your sin.

And now, having finished that work of salvation, He has placed you in this little boat called Redeemer Lutheran Church where there is safety because Jesus is here with you. And this is how you know He is here - because here is where you receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen