

Pentecost 12

August 23, 2020

Matthew 14:22-33

Sooner or later it will happen to all of us. Sooner or later we will all face fear. Yet, Jesus doesn't want us to live in fear. He says in our text: **"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** His words are simple. His words are clear. And yet, we fear. Why? Sometimes we fear what we cannot control. These disciples of Jesus could not control the wind that was tossing them all around while they were on the Sea of Galilee. We fear things that we perceive it being a threat to us. That fear may be real or imagined. I wonder what the disciples were thinking as they faced this wind all night? Did they begin to ask themselves: *Why did Jesus send us on our way? Where is he when we need him the most? Would you be afraid?*

Matthew begins our text: **"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."** Immediately, after Jesus fed the 5,000 and the disciples gathered up the left overs, Jesus send everyone on their way. There is no time to hang out with this crowd that had just been fed in this miraculous way. No small talk. Immediately Jesus says both to the disciples and the crowd: GO!

Why does Jesus send everyone away so quickly? Jesus knew what they were thinking. John tells us in his Gospel account: **"Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.** This crowd began to think: *If Jesus could feed so many people with so little, imagine what would happen if he was our king.* So, what does Jesus do? He tells the crowd to go home. He tells the disciples to get in their boat and go. Jesus was not going to let that happen. He wanted to send a clear message to them that he was not interested in becoming the type of king that they wanted. This King did not come to rule a nation. He came to save this world. He came to satisfy the wrath of God and defeat this world's greatest enemy, the Devil himself.

The disciples get in the boat to go as Jesus had told them. Crossing the Sea of Galilee was an easy task for some of them who had been fishermen. This trip should have taken them about an hour. It was probably around 6pm when they set out. About 9 hours later they are in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. The other Gospel writers tell us they had only gone about 3 ½ miles. It is now about 3 o'clock in the morning. It is dark. This wind just doesn't let up. All night they had been fighting this wind. They were tired and simply worn out.

What are your fears? What keeps you up in the middle of the night? What are you struggling with right now? Jesus promises He rules over all creation. He promises He will deliver us from all adversity and provide for all our needs. But we do not always see it. We are often like those disciples worn out and scared in the middle of the night. We become fearful and we begin to doubt God's promises just like those disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

In the middle of that dark night, Jesus wanted to teach his disciples that they had nothing to fear. It should not have surprised them that Jesus showed up announced. **"Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear."** They didn't see him coming, but he saw them. He knew exactly the fears that were facing them. He wanted them to see that. It made no sense for them to be afraid. They had just seen him feed 5,000. A ghost? Really? It made no sense that they should be afraid of those waves. Jesus would have had every right to chastise his disciples. Instead, Jesus encourages them: **"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."**

Peter was always the adventurous disciple. Peter then took the opportunity to focus on Jesus and showed his trust in a remarkable way. He reasoned that if Jesus was able to walk on the water himself, surely Jesus could let him walk on the water too. **"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."** Jesus says to Peter: Come! I wonder what it must have felt like for Peter that day. As he gets out of the boat, he begins to walk on top of the water. He does something that is impossible for anyone to do. He walks on top of water.

Then Peter failed. How could he fail? He had seen Jesus feed the 5,000. He's walking on top of water. In the middle of these rough seas he's looking right at Jesus. Then it happened. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "**Lord, save me!**"

How about you? I think we can identify with Peter more than we would like to admit? We don't always trust God. When we go through the storms of life, we may also cry out to Jesus and say: "**Lord, save me!**" What does Jesus do? Notice what Jesus did. He didn't let Peter drown and say, "*Oops, you really should have trusted me. Sorry.*" Nor did he even let him "suffer" a little bit in that water before ultimately rescuing him. No, Matthew who as one of the disciples was an eyewitness to all of this, says that Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. There is a slight reprimand on Jesus part, "**Why did you doubt?**" but its tone is one not of scolding but encouragement: "*Why doubt? Remember I can always take care of you.*"

How can we know that? God tells us to look at the cross. There are on that cross we see Jesus take care of everything. There on that cross, we see a God who loves us so deeply. When we find us sinking down in the middle of the storms of this life, Jesus grabs us by the hand and says: *Here I Am*. He pulls us up to safety.

Jesus wasn't done yet that day. Matthew tells us: "**And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'**" But he still is not done. John adds one more detail to this event. He writes: "**Immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.**" (John 6:21) May God help us all to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.