

Sermon for August 4, 2024 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33 (EHV)

Theme: Truly, He is the Son of God, who

- 1) Knows our toil,
- 2) Stills our fear,
- 3) Welcomes our trust,
- 4) Delivers us from doubt,
- 5) And Grants us peace.

²² Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. ²⁴ By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" ²⁷ But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid." ²⁸ Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid. As he began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³ Those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!"

Do you understand what it means that Jesus is the Son of God? We would like to think we do. But whenever problems pop up in our life, we often act as if it's up to us to solve them alone. Because we don't physically see Jesus, we often fail to recognize his presence in the face of crisis and go to him for help.

How wonderful it is, then, that the LORD recorded today's sermon text for our meditation. Through the example of Jesus walking to the disciples on the wavy sea, let us learn about Jesus' divine concern and ability to care for us, under the theme: **Truly, He is the Son of God, who 1) Knows our toil, 2) Stills our fears, 3) Welcomes our trust, 4) Delivers us from doubt, 5) Grants us peace.**

Part One: Knows Our Toil.

Our sermon text takes place in the evening after Jesus showed his divine power by feeding a crowd of over 5000 people. We read:

²² Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the

mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. ²⁴ By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it.

Just picture the disciples - labouring alone on the windy, wavy sea at Jesus' command. The Bible does not tell us that they were in any immediate danger, but (being nighttime) they were most certainly exhausted from all their labour.

Where was Jesus? He was on top of a mountain, alone with his Father in prayer. Even though he was apart from his disciples, that doesn't mean he didn't know about their toil. He knew and cared. How so? Because he is the Son of God.

Like the disciples, we Christians go forth at Christ's command - working hard for him. When the storms of life beat against us, we continue to labour as best we can. But with the wind of worldly problems blowing in opposition, we easily become exhausted. We are tired and Jesus seems so far away. Doesn't he know? Doesn't he care? Yes, being in very nature God, Jesus knows and cares. In fact, he intercedes to God the Father on our behalf. Like his disciples on the lake, he will not let us sink. He will come to our aid.

Part Two: Stills Our Fears

We read: ²⁵ *In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!"*

At first glance, the disciples' reaction might seem a little foolish; but put yourself in their position. It is 3 AM and you've been rowing for hours - getting practically nowhere. You are about 5 kilometres out to sea with the wind and waves beating against your boat. You are exhausted, but know that if you stop piloting your boat against the waves, you might capsize. Suddenly, you see a figure of a man walking towards you on the dark water. Who of us wouldn't be freaking out?

²⁷ *But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid."*

Just as the Lord came to his disciples on the stormy sea, He also comes to us. Our life may be full of labour, and we may feel like we are getting nowhere. We are alone, scared, and at wits' end. But the Lord is near. He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments to reassure us that he is the almighty Son of God. "Take courage and be of good cheer," he says, "It is I - your almighty Saviour. Don't be afraid; I come in love. I am here to calm your troubled heart. I will not let you drown in a sea of trouble. Let my presence comfort and console you, for I am your Saviour, who died on the cross for all your sins and rose again so that you can live with me forever in paradise."

Part Three: Who welcomes our trust.

Hearing this news seems too good to be true! Is Jesus really with us? How wonderful if it is true! But how can he be with us now? Perhaps it was thoughts like these that led Peter to reply:

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

At first glance, it might seem as if Peter was tempted to doubt whether the person walking on the water was Jesus. At the same time, Peter’s request shows incredible faith in who He believed Jesus to be – for only God himself could issue such a command for Peter to follow.

Both doubt and faith in the same breath – does this sound familiar? It does to me! We believe incredible things about Jesus, and yet we sometimes struggle to apply them to ourselves. Is Jesus really speaking to me through the Bible? Is Jesus really present in the Lord’s Supper with His body and blood? Is Jesus really with me – and every Christian on this earth – at the same time? He says he is, but often his presence seems as impossible as the sight of Him walking on the water to the disciples. Lord, we do believe. Help us with our unbelief.

The Lord welcomed Peter's faith - as conflicted as it may have been. He wanted to strengthen it so that Peter, and all who would hear this account, might believe that he is the almighty Son of God.

²⁹ Jesus said, “Come!” Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus.

The Lord loves it when we put our trust in His Word. He accomplishes amazing things through us - promising to hear our prayers and give us what we ask for in faith. The only times he may not give us what we ask for is when we ask for something sinful, doubt, or if what we ask for conflicts with his good and gracious will for us.

Peter’s request may have sounded foolish and unnecessary, but his faith certainly wasn’t. For this reason, Jesus answered Peter’s request with, "Come." And because the Son of God commanded it, Peter trusted he could do it. And so, Peter did the impossible: he walked on water at Jesus’ command!

May the Lord grant us a faith like Peter’s: one that is not afraid to ask boldly, and that takes Jesus at his Word. This is the kind of trust Jesus loves.

Part Four: Delivers Us from Doubt.

Unfortunately, we are weak and sinful. It is so easy for us to let things distract us from trusting Jesus as we ought. The same was true for Peter.

We read: *But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid. As he began to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”* ³¹ *Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

What Jesus said of Peter is true of all of us. Oh, how frail is our conviction and how easily we waver. None of us possess the faith we ought. It is all too easy to take our eyes off Jesus. Note the danger we are in when we do that. Peter immediately began to sink. Taking his eyes off Jesus could have cost Peter his life. But even this danger was from God's gracious hand. The distress

woke Peter's faith up. It led him to cry out the prayer that every Christian should be ready to pray: "Lord, save me!"

God promises: *Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you...*ⁱ This is exactly what Peter did: he cried out to his Saviour in faith, and his Saviour immediately showed his mercy by grabbing hold of Peter.

As the Lord saved Peter, so he also saves us. Sometimes the distressing and dangerous times he allows in our lives are exactly the kind of times we need to wake us up to cry to the Lord in faith. And the Lord hears our cries. He sends his hand to grab hold of us and keep us from sinking. For some, the rescue is immediate. For others, the Lord may take his time to accomplish his will. But no matter how long it takes, the Lord will not let us sink. He will rescue us. And when he does, our faith is strengthened.

"You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Why do we doubt? I can offer no answer other than that we are sinful and weak. Since Jesus is the all-powerful Son of God, who keeps all his promises, there is no real reason to doubt. May this truth lead us to pray: Lord, *I do believe. Help me with my unbelief!*ⁱⁱ

Part Five: Grants Us Peace.

Our text continues: ²² *When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.*

The wind stopping was no coincidence. The Lord did it. And that is not the only thing He did. We read in the Gospel of John that, after Jesus got into the boat, *immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Is it any wonder that *those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!"*

This is exactly what Jesus wanted his disciples to know and confess. It is also what Jesus wants us to believe. Faith in Jesus brings relief. It brings peace. Even though we find ourselves toiling away when the storms of life strike, the LORD does not want us to forget that he knows and cares. He sees what we are going through and comes to us through His Word and Sacraments to calm our fears and give us relief. He welcomes our trust in him – imperfect as it is. Why? So that he can give us the peace we desperately need.

And the peace the Lord gives us is much better than anything the world can offer.^{iv} While it is true that the LORD may not immediately cause all our troubles and trials on this earth to cease, nevertheless we can be sure that the peace Jesus offers us will end in deliverance – just as it did for the disciples on the stormy sea. When we reach the other side, we will certainly confess with them: "Truly you are the Son of God!" Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 50:15 EHV

ⁱⁱ Mark 9:24 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ John 6:21 EHV

