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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 17, 2014
10th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 17:1-7 Acts 24:22-26

Hymns: 541; 396; 306:1-6; 313:1

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 14:22-34

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: The miracles of Jesus

The miracles which Jesus performed were central to His ministry as the Christ. It had been foretold by the prophets that these miracles would occur, and so these miracles were evidence that the people who were very familiar with the Scriptures should be watching for as they waited and hoped for the coming of the Christ.

Jesus' miracles were also a clear and strong statement concerning His divine nature. Jesus frequently did these miracles, and they weren't fabrications of the disciples, or folk lore that rose up after Jesus removed His visible presence from this world. They were very real. They were bold statements about Jesus which continue to deliver to us important messages regarding our Savior, and His care for us, and His almighty power and the greatness of His compassion.

This morning we are considering a miracle which many have tried to explain away as being not much more than a trick. Some contend that Jesus was so familiar with the Sea of Galilee that He knew where the sand bars were, and Jesus was approaching the boat by walking out to the middle of the Sea of Galilee on this sand bar. So they would claim that when Peter stepped out of the boat he also walked on the sand bar, but when Peter slipped down into the water he had taken a misstep and had dropped off into the depths of the sea. Now, which story is more incredible?

The corrupt mind of man seeks to bring Jesus down, down to our level, down to being a regular guy. A good guy, and a wise teacher, but the incarnate Son of God, ah – who can tell? That's not really important to His message and mission anyway, is it? Oh, indeed it is! If Jesus is the Christ our Savior then we need to understand that He is God Almighty Himself. He is not only omnipotent, but He is eternal, and omnipresent! He is our Lord and our God whom we

need for life and salvation. This miracle is significant for us also today! --

THEME: That Jesus' Walks on Water Assures Us of the Power of His Presence.

Jesus' own words on this occasion direct us to --

I. Finding Courage in Jesus' Presence.

Let us recall the situation the disciples found themselves in, and how they got there. Jesus had just performed another great miracle, the feeding of the five thousand. John reports that the people responded by trying to make Jesus a king, a king who would be able to supply them with daily bread for which they wouldn't have to work. They missed the point of Jesus' miracle and completely forgot or dismissed the whole day's lesson on the nature of the Kingdom of God. In response Jesus dismissed the crowd, and sent the disciples across the sea while He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. (There is a whole nother sermon in that fact which we will reserve for another occasion.)

The disciples were trying to cross the sea, and found themselves caught in a storm, hours going by and making little or no headway. Where was the Lord when you needed Him? Surely that thought must have crossed their minds as they struggled to stay afloat. They thought they were alone in that boat and that the Lord Jesus was too far away to help them in their time of need.

Then they saw Him, but they didn't think it was the Lord. They thought it was some specter, a ghost and they were even more frightened to see this form traveling across the dark and stormy surface of the water towards their boat. Could it be anything less than the angel of death coming to collect them.

Then the voice of the Savior is heard, saying: "**Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid**" (v. 27). That word spoken by the Savior really meant far more than "good cheer." It is a word that means "**take courage, be fearless!**" He would dispel their fears both about the idea of a spirit or ghost coming to get them, and of the storm that was overwhelming these experienced seamen. With the Lord by their side they had nothing to fear. With the Lord by their side they could be courageous even in the face of a dangerous storm. **And the Lord was by their side!** He was by their side and

aware of all that was going on with them even when He was up alone on the mountain in prayer.

That is how it was and how it has been for the child of God from the beginning of time. When Joshua faced the prospect of leading Israel into Canaan to conquer the Promised Land he went with the Lord at his side. So God encouraged Joshua:

Joshua 1:5-6 “I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage.”

And so the Lord would encourage us also as we face the dangers, or tribulations, or challenges that life holds for each of us. **The Lord is there for us.** He calls out to us “**Be of good cheer. Be courageous!**” The Lord is by our side and watching over us and caring for us. We need not fear the specter of evil that might overtake us in the storms of life, storms that seem to be holding us back from making any headway. The Lord is there and He cares for you, and yes, **Jesus can walk on water.** All things are possible with the Lord! He can bring help in time of need.

We need to be bold about asking. Our text has a lesson for us about that also. Our attention is directed to Peter, and --

II. Peter’s Example of Faith -- and Frailty of Faith.

Some might think that Peter was rather presumptuous in his request to join the Lord, or that Peter was being haughty in questioning if it really was the Lord. If Peter didn’t know and believe that it was Jesus he wouldn’t have ventured out of the boat. Jesus’ word filled Peter with confidence. It wasn’t **self**-confidence as we too often find displayed by Peter in the gospels. It was the confidence of faith. It was confidence in Jesus and the power of Jesus’ Word. Peter stepped out of the boat and **walked on water!** **Peter** walked on water. That wasn’t by any power that Peter possessed. It was the power of the Lord that was present with Peter.

That power was not reserved for Peter alone. That power is there for you and me also. **Only believe! Have confidence in Jesus as your Savior and your God!** Know the authority of His Word! **Be courageous** in reaching out in life, in stepping out of the safety of

the boat while serving the Lord and following His Word. No, I am not encouraging anyone to tempt God with foolish risks and reckless behavior in pursuing OUR goals and ambitions. I am talking about being courageous in our lives as disciples, and being bold in addressing the Lord with our concerns and challenges and trials in life. Take courage! The Lord is with us and the power of His Word is sure. Paul knew it. He declared of his manner in ministry, **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”** (Philippians 2:13).

That was the confidence of faith that made it possible for Peter to walk on water. It wasn't that Peter's faith was so strong, but that Peter's faith was placed in an almighty God and Savior. This becomes apparent very quickly with Peter.

All of a sudden there was a wave crashing toward Peter, and his focus shifted from the power of Jesus to the power of that wave, and Peter felt threatened by it, and his confidence in Jesus wavered and Peter doubted, and he quickly began to sink.

Please, let us note how and why Peter began to sink. It wasn't the Lord failing Peter. It was Peter failing the Lord. It was Peter who doubted the Lord's ability to maintain this wonder in Peter's life, and so Peter began to sink. That's important because we miss that obvious, or it should be obvious point in our own lives. How often do the waves coming our way in life intimidate us, and make our faith waver? Often enough for us to know that is where the trouble lies. Peter had a frail faith, **and so do we all**. If our faith was the size of a grain of mustard seed we could move mountains. Moved any mountains lately? Neither have I. We doubt, not only ourselves, but the blessing and power of the Lord in our lives. And so we often find ourselves sinking, and joining Peter in his panicked prayer: **“Lord, save me!”**

It was panicked, but it was a faith-filled prayer. The danger, the actual sinking into the sea, refocused Peter's faith on the One who has power to save. He turned to Jesus in his time of need. And Jesus hand was right there to retrieve His disciple.

III. Christ is Present with Enduring Love.

Jesus didn't say, "You doubted me so now save yourself!" He was there with that hand of deliverance. Yes, He did chide Peter for the weakness of faith and for doubting the power of Jesus' Word, but the Lord's love is enduring. That is what it says time and again in the psalms. "**His mercy endures forever!**" Jesus' love endures forever! You or I might give up on someone like us. We might conclude that we had done enough already! But that is not the Lord's attitude. He understands us better than we understand ourselves. He understands us, and we can be confident of that because He did come down to earth to be our brother. We read of this marvelous grace in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus endured all the trials and tribulations and challenges and yes, very real temptations that we do. He knows and understands what you face, the fears in your heart. He is there ready, willing, and able to help. **Be bold.** Address Jesus with confidence. He loves you. He died to save you. He will not forsake you. His steadfast love endures forever. He reaches out His hand to save us. By faith we take hold of His hand knowing its power to save. Yes, He may chide us for the weakness of our faith, but He also presents us with the means to strengthen our faith with the hearing of the Word and receiving the sacrament as we are doing again this morning. Take it to heart. Here we receive the evidence of Jesus' love. Here the Spirit strengthens our faith so that we may say with the hymn writer:

TLH 428:1,5,6 "I am trusting Thee Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free.

5, "I am trusting Thee for power; Thine can never fail. Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me Must prevail.

6. "I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus; Never let me fall.
I am trusting Thee forever and for all."

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.