

Lord, Help Our Unbelief!

Mark 6:45-56

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

July 29, 2018 – Tenth Sunday After Pentecost



In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In this morning's Gospel – while Jesus stayed behind to pray – we heard how His disciples were attempting to cross the Sea of Galilee at night by themselves – something they probably wouldn't have tried if Jesus hadn't ordered it – for surely they would have known that the nighttime hours on this body of water were when storms were the rule rather than the exception. They had already been caught once in a violent storm while Jesus slept at the helm – but this time they were on their own. Progress was slow as the waves and wind pounded their boat. Dawn was fast approaching. Nerves were frayed, tempers short, and they probably were wondering Who's idea this was.

But then there was Jesus walking toward them on the water. Imagine! **Nothing** – not even wind, water or waves – could keep Jesus from protecting His disciples. So Jesus, “Ruler of wind and wave,” came walking on the water, because Jesus can do as He pleases with His creation – for everything is His and obeys His bidding. So consider for a moment how you and I are like the disciples out there on the Sea of Galilee in the fourth watch of our night. The storms of life are raging. Our lives are being threatened. We're tired and afraid, yet we also know the morning is near. Jesus will be coming soon, and there is **nothing** that can hurt or harm us.

But let's return to the disciples. You would think that when they saw Jesus walking toward them on the water they would have been comforted, but in fact they were even more terrified and frightened than before. “It's a ghost,” they said – “a phantom!” It seemed things were going from bad to worse. First it was the storm, and now they were being assaulted by a ghost! That's why it's important to note that it wasn't **seeing** Jesus that brought them comfort, but rather **hearing** Him. “Take heart. It is I!” He said, “Have no fear.” This was much more than Jesus saying, “Hey, it's Me, guys. There's nothing to worry about.” No, this was Jesus' way of saying – “It's Me – **I AM**” – which is God's Old Testament covenant Name. By that Word of Jesus the disciples would be sure to know that the One walking toward them on the waves was none other than the Lord of heaven and earth, the One who had brought Israel out of Egypt and saved His people from the slavery and domination of Pharaoh. Hearing this Divine Name coming from the lips of Jesus brought the disciples great comfort and peace, for faith comes by hearing, not by seeing – and when Jesus puts His Name into your ears, you are comforted.

But that comforting Word is also a powerful, empowering Word by which Jesus draws His disciples to Himself. Just look at what Peter did next, as Matthew reports it. He cried out: “Lord, if it's You, bid me to come to You on the water.” Faith, you see, is never content with simply knowing Jesus is out there **somewhere**. Faith desires Communion with Jesus – to be with Him where He is, to walk with Him where He walks, and to do what He bids you to do. But here's the rub: to walk where Jesus walks you have to leave your life behind. You have to forsake everything and utterly empty yourself. You have to die – and then rise from that death with Jesus. That's why, when Peter heard Jesus tell him to come, Peter left everything behind in the boat to venture out onto the water where there was nothing but Jesus' Word – which alone could hold him up and keep him from drowning.

But as Peter quickly learned, so long as you still have any trust in yourself, you'll never be able to walk on water. You might talk a good game, but the truth is your bluff has already been called. Without Jesus, you are doomed to sink – whether you're trying to walk on water or stand on your own before the Judgment Seat of God. Jesus' Word, you see, Jesus' Word is a powerful Word filled with the Holy Spirit. His Word heals the sick, casts out demons, and raises the dead. It has the power to make men do what Jesus does. And it was **that** Word which came from the lips of Jesus into the ears of Peter and held him up – keeping him above the chaos and giving him a firm footing even with the waves breaking all around him. And friends, if Jesus' Word can make Peter walk on water, think how much more that same Word from Jesus can hold you in the Father's love, forgive you your sin, and raise you from the dead!

Jesus calls His disciples to walk with Him by faith – both individually and together as His body, the Church. That means you need look for **no** assurance other than Jesus' Word – **no** certainty other than His promise to forgive – **no** comfort other than His cross – and **no** strength other than the Word and the Sacraments through which He reaches out, grabs hold of you, and lifts you up to walk with Him. He calls out to you to turn your back on the false comfort and security of your little boat with its puny little lifelines and life preservers. He calls out to you to reject the idolatries of this age so that you might become nothing in yourself and learn to lean entirely on His Word. He calls you to stand with Him in the churning waters of this life where babies die, marriages falter, families endure hardship and turmoil, bodies grow sick, and minds are shattered. He says to you in the midst of the storm,

“Be not afraid, It is I. **I AM** is with you – and **I AM** is for you.” Where Jesus walks, be assured, dear child of God, that you too can walk in the power of His Word – yes, even through death and the grave – and that you not only can, but will rise again to eternal life. He is there with you and for you, you know – every step of the way. Trust in Him – and trust also in His Word *for you*.

Look at what happened to Peter. Everything was fine and dandy until that moment when he allowed himself to be distracted by the wind and the waves and took his eyes off Jesus. Soon fear and doubt became like lead weights tied around his ankles and he commenced to sink. Likewise, when you allow your eyes to govern your ears, and when you believe what you see rather than what you hear from the Lord in His Word, you too will find yourself filled with doubt and fear. The minute you take your eyes and ears away Christ and His Word – once you focus on the wind, the water, the waves and the storms of life – you’ll soon find that even the most rock-solid faith quickly turns to Jell-O. Granted, compared to the waves of a stormy sea, Jesus could *sometimes* appear small to your little faith – at least smaller than the disasters and diseases that sometimes threaten your life. At times Jesus *will* seem smaller than your problems, your disappointments, and your unanswered prayers. But when reason and sight take over – paralyzed by fear, and drowning in doubt – that’s when you’re more likely to give in to the waves, run from your responsibilities, abandon your duties, and be pulled down in the undertow of self-pity – and all because you refuse to trust this comforting, powerful Jesus who causes men to walk on water with His Word.

You see, faith is only as big or as small, as the Jesus to whom that faith clings. If you have a little Jesus you’re likely to have a little faith. But if you have a big Jesus, your faith will be much larger. So, the antidote to little faith is a bigger dose of Jesus. For example, in little faith, Peter cried out, “Lord save me!” And a very big Jesus – greater than even the wind and the waves – heard Peter’s cry and put out His strong hand to pull him to safety. What Jesus did with Peter, He also wants to do with you. Jesus comes to you in the water of Holy Baptism, makes Himself known to you by Name, claims you as His own, and places His name on you. He then bids you to come, take up the cross He lays on you, and follow Him. He calls you out of your false securities and beliefs as He strips away all your props, your self-chosen works, your dignity, and your defenses. He leaves you entirely helpless and hopeless with nothing to cling to but His Word ringing in your ears – and no prayer but “Lord, save me,”

on your lips. It’s *precisely* at that moment – at that moment when you’re most helpless – at that moment when you’re literally dead – that He reaches down into your death and pulls you into eternal life, saying: “O man, O woman, of little faith. Why did you doubt? Did you not know that the One who hung on a cross of wood to save you would never let you go?”

As you see Peter and Jesus back on the boat all safe and sound you might want to note how that boat – in a manner of speaking – had almost become like a little Church – a Church with Jesus in the center and His disciples gathered around Him in worship – just as you and I are gathered here today around Jesus in His Sermon and Supper. For where Jesus is, there also is peace. There on the Sea of Galilee the wind had ceased to blow. The waves no longer raged, and morning drew close on the horizon. It was a time of resurrection and new life for everyone on that boat who realized how close they had come to death and dying. And then there was worship – blessed worship – as the disciples confessed together, “Truly You are the Son of God!” For confessing Jesus as the “Son of God” is the greatest thing anyone could ever say about Him. Indeed He *is* the very Son of God. He’s the Son of God at His Baptism, where He took up your sin and carried it on His own shoulders. He’s the Son of God when He walks on the water. He’s the Son of God on the mountain of His glory. He’s the Son of God when He hangs dead on the cross for your sin. And He’s the Son of God when He comes to you in His Word – offering you His Body and His Blood to eat and drink for your soul’s salvation and the strengthening of your faith. What a glorious thing to know that He is always the same Son of God, whether being Baptized, walking on the Sea, dying on the cross, or blessing you in your Baptism and in His Supper.

Dear friends, when you know this Son of God has done all these things for you, it’s then that you also know Him as your Savior – the One to whom you can confidently pray, “Lord, save me!” This same Jesus who walked on the water, is now bidding you to come – to come and walk with Him – not on the water, but in the water – in the water of your Baptism, where you died and were raised with Him – in that glassy sea of Baptismal grace in which He daily says to you, “Take heart. It is I. **I AM** is here for you. Come out of yourself and walk with Me. Do not fear, but be believing.” Lord, we do believe. Help us in our unbelief. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.