

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



SERMON for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14; Series A)

August 7, 2005 and 2014 - St. John, Farley; modified 2020- Trinity, Kearney

Matthew 14:22-33 (Walking on Water)

In Nomine Iesu. Personal preference doesn't do well in eternal matters. It will always get you *into* trouble. Preference belongs to the sinful, fallen world. It is what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God. Advertisers make it their number one job to figure out what you want, and then make sure you use your power of choice to buy what they're selling you. When you rely on your own choice, you are in control. God who laid the foundations of the earth, setting boundaries for the seas, and He who has been commanding the morning to dawn every day since creation—He's been dethroned and you have just taken over. Your dreams and goals and desires appear front-and-center, and everything else fades to the background. Why is the customer always right? Because personal preference and choice rules the day in this world. But once choice and decision enters the realm of the church, then disaster is poised to strike, and the venom is nearly impossible to remove.

For Choice is an idol, it is a false god that threatens to push you away from the one true God who offers you His gifts through Jesus Christ His only Son. Choice is powerful. It can cover up the death of a person who some doctor says is too young, too old or too sick to live, and so that human being is OK to kill or to assist in suicide, because Choice demanded it. Sinful human nature, hungry for the power of preference, has decided it is better to people of the world to lose a few million lives, whether infant, elderly or in between, than to give up the right to choose what you want to do with the body that God has created and given you. The perversion of marrying someone of the same sex is defended these days based on someone asserting what they have been taught is their right—I can love whom I choose to love and no one can tell me I can't. The idol of choice is not just out there in the cruel world. It has already infected the church, too. You can see it when you come across a preacher or a Christian songwriter who emphasizes how important it is for you to make your decision for Jesus. Being a Christian, as it is often portrayed, should be your preference, and no one can make that decision for you. And many are led astray from what the Bible clearly teaches on salvation because when you are worshipping the idol of choice, you are really worshipping yourself.

As it is with every idol and false god, you become enticed by what looks good. You follow your preference because you know it will give good results

for you. Some of the most ancient idols known to archaeology are gods that were thought to provide fertility for people and crops. Eve chose to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree because she saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and she desired to gain wisdom (Genesis 3). Another way to put it is that she was afraid that God was keeping away from her a wisdom that she needed. Either way, she and her negligent husband Adam exercised their preference based on what they saw, and they did not obey the Word of God that they heard. If you've ever read the book of Judges, you would have seen a refrain that is said repetitively about the multiple rises and falls of the nation of Israel before the time of King David. Whenever the people disobeyed God and fell away, the historical record says: everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.

The false god of choice and preference takes what you see or experience and makes it drown out the Word of God that you hear. Because of that, it quickly attacks the very foundation that keeps the Church standing and causes Christians to sink into doubt and despair. Preference converts faithful hearers, and receivers of God's gifts into demanding stockholders. It changes preachers of the Word into chief executives who must meet the bottom line or else they're replaced. People don't come, or they stay away, so the reasoning goes, because the church doesn't meet their preferences. They can find something else that they would rather do. Sadly, churches change today not because they want to be true to the Gospel, but rather they want to compete for the choice of an untapped market of warm bodies. Try us out, world! We'll make it worth your while!

In no place does the Bible ever encourage you to follow your personal preference. But there might be no better biblical story that destroys that idea completely than the story of Peter walking on the water to Jesus, then sinking, and then getting rescued by His outstretched hand. I cannot say for sure because the Bible doesn't address it, but I'm pretty confident to assume that before this particular night, Peter never did have the inner desire to walk on water. I'd be surprised if the thought had ever before crossed his mind. Peter simply would not be waiting with bated breath for the opportunity to try doing it. The decision to walk on water did not appear to be the better choice based on what Peter saw. It would seem

silly for him to walk on water toward a ghost if all he wanted to do was prove how brave he was and earn the bragging rights among his friends. The thing that makes the difference here in this biblical account is not Peter's choice, but the Word that Jesus spoke.

Peter and the other disciples were being deceived by what their eyes saw. Because of the huge storm, a boat trip that usually only took a few hours was lasting long into the night, so long that the Roman guards changed shifts four times at their posts, which is what the "fourth watch" means. What those in the boat saw were the waves and wind pushing them back. They saw that they didn't have Jesus to calm this storm for them. They saw that they were alone. But then as if it couldn't get any worse, something was coming closer to them, something that brought them even more fear. Sure, you know now that it was Jesus, but the way those disciples saw Him, based only on what their eyes were telling them, it was a ghost, that is, an evil spirit perhaps impersonating someone else. It required hearing the Word of God to calm down the fear that was produced by what they saw. "Take courage. It is I. (Literally, He said, "I AM," which is the Holy Name of God.) Don't be afraid." That was a powerful Word. That is what turned the tide for these frightened disciples. What they heard immediately changed for them what they saw. Those words from the lips of Jesus were what inspired courageous faith in the heart of Peter. Based on what Jesus said, and not on his natural, sinful, personal choice, Peter then requested to hear yet one more powerful Word from the Lord: he wanted to hear the word, "Come." And that Word, not the determination of Peter, was all that was needed to enable his feet for a brief moment to stand on top of the water just like Jesus. What he heard with his ears was taking the proper precedence over what he saw with his eyes.

But not for long. Because his eyes were going to take over again. He would be deceived by what he saw. He would be quickly distracted from the Word of Jesus. His preference was to doubt the Lord, and as choice always does, it got him into trouble. As Jesus said, Peter had little faith, but that little faith cried out to the only one who could save his life. As this disciple found himself in the depths of death, he had nowhere to hold, except the outstretched hand of the Son of God. When He who formed the heavens and the earth in six days has you in His firm grasp, I'd imagine you would feel safe and secure, too. Wouldn't it be nice to have that now, with what you might be going through?

Well, that's what you're receiving here right now. You have heard the powerful Word of God. You have tasted His real, true Body and Blood that He offers to you like an outstretched hand. For Jesus is not just simply a powerful weather man or water-walker. He has wiped out your sin as well. Though you have sunk into the depths of rebellion against God, your Savior is right there to pull you up. He has taken away your idolatry to choice, and He made that sin nail Him to the cross to die for you. As He is risen from the dead, just as surely are you forgiven from following your preference. As you are moved by the gift of the Holy Spirit, you now make the new choice to give up on Choice and give up on your sinful self. You are empowered by what you hear, and not by what you see. By the way, reading sign language and the written Word of Scripture is also considered "hearing." And what do you hear? "Take courage! He who is the I AM is here for you! Don't be afraid anymore. Your sins and poor choices will not drown you."

Be glad that you worship the Lord simply by hearing this powerful Word, and not by your doing something different that might momentarily please your personal preference. Come to the Divine Service as a refuge for your soul, as a fountain of rich and lavish gifts that you could never choose for yourself, and not as you would go to a concert or theme park or coffee shop. Hear with your ears what your eyes cannot yet see, that is, the true heavenly picture of worship as you are joining angels, archangels and all the company of heaven including the blessed saints who have passed away before you.

By the time you leave this place or those at home turn off your screen, you will probably have been distracted from the Word of Christ by something else that seems better right now to your eye. But let your little faith rest assured that Jesus is right there walking upon Baptismal water combined with the Word to rescue you just as He did sinking Peter. Though you may fear from time to time for your family to stay together, for the utter dilapidation of our society and freedoms, or for the boat of the Church that seems to be on the verge of sinking, take courage; don't be afraid. He who is the I AM still speaks through His powerful Word. Miracles still happen, and if you aren't walking on water, then you'll be assured to know that, even better, your merciful Lord Jesus is already with you in the boat. In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.