

## RESCUED FROM DROWNING

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, A.D. 2011, August 7

**Matt. 14:22-33** 22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The title of my homily today is: "Rescued From Drowning."  
Every Spring the warnings go out on Sac'to radio and TV -- "The American River water is very cold from snow melt and very swift; wear life jackets."  
But every year young and old dare-devils drown in that river.

The Apostle Peter was a fisherman -- he knew water -- he had probably seen drowning victims from the sudden storms that came up on the Sea of Galilee where he made his living. He knew that the combination of wind and water made very powerful waves. Peter's experience on that water in this episode in the life of our Savior is one of the most widely known of all the stories of the Bible.  
Who hasn't heard of walking on water -- by both Jesus and Peter!  
But here's a question: What does this story mean? And what does it mean to you?  
In a short time from now I want you to be able to answer those questions in a new way.

### Part 1. The Real Possibility of Drowning

**First problem: extreme forces are against us as they were for the Twelve.**

Our text reads, "22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them."

The disciples were fighting the extreme force of the the storm.  
They struggled mightily against wind and waves.

What powerful forces are fighting against Christians today?  
An easy illustration -- how **the government schools** are leading our children away from God. For example, it is now baldly taught that evolution is a fact, not a theory. But we believe and know that God made the universe, our world and all that exists. If the theory of evolution is accepted as truth, then there are no moral absolutes and no God to love us and care for us and provide an everlasting home for us. If people believe that everything happens by chance, then secular determinism takes over and we are not responsible for our acts. So, many of the young people of the church are acting as if there is no eternal goal, no purpose for life beyond what pleasures they can experience with their five senses.

Another powerful force at work in our nation is the **American Civil Liberties Union**. The ACLU is hard at work trying to take all Christian symbols out of our culture -- take the Ten Commandments out of the courtroom, take the phrase "under God" out of the pledge of allegiance, tear down the crosses over the graves of the Christian fallen, etc., etc.

I know because I support the ACLJ, the *American Center for Law and Justice*, headed by a Christian attorney, who informs me of the victories he's won in the courts by his use of our Constitution.  
There's a real possibility of drowning in our increasingly secular society.

**Second point: Our eyesight has poor focus.**

Our story continues, v. 25 "And early in the morning he [Jesus] came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear."

The disciples thought they saw a ghost -- they didn't see Jesus.

They saw, but they didn't see -- their focus was not only poor -- it was way off.

We say, "Seeing is believing," or "I'm from Missouri -- you gotta show me."

But we forget that we see with our brain, not our eyes only. Our brain interprets for us.

The brains of the disciples interpreted very poorly -- out of fear.

OK, what about Peter? His Lord reassured him, but Peter still said (v. 27), "... **if** it is you ..."  
That's a very big "**IF**." What he really saw was the waves -- and he began to sink. Focus issue?  
Notice, Peter was drowning in spite of the Word of God, in spite of the promise of his Master.  
Jesus: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, **if** it is you ..."  
The Word of Jesus was not enough! !

Where do we focus in time of trouble? Is the Word of God enough for us?

A real problem for us is that we seek God apart from His revealed Word.

What that means is that we demand that God do things our way. . . . . Yes.!

When we look elsewhere than in Holy Writ, we are setting ourselves against how God wants to be known.

Martin Luther said that God is not only gracious and loving -- God also hides Himself.

But the hidden God is *Der zornige Gott* -- the angry God -- the God of wrath.

The hidden God is not a God who saves -- the God who saves will be found only where He reveals Himself, namely, in Word and Sacraments.

Searching any where else for any other God leaves us drowning.

Artists and songwriters of our day may be the most sensitive to what pulls us under.

Arlo Guthrie, a folk song writer, son of Woodie Guthrie, wrote this chorus in one of his songs:

I'm going down for the third time -- And I need a helping hand  
The rooster crows and I'm sinking -- Heart of stone, drowning man.

["Drowning Man" -- Words & Music, Arlo Guthrie, *Outlasting the Blues*, 1979 Warner Bros. Records, Inc.]

**Part 2. We Are Rescued Because We Have a Rescuer**

**First Point: This Rescue is for drowning doubters.**

Now Peter was a brave man -- we'll have to give him that.

Even in his doubt -- "... **if** it is You ... " -- he said, "... command me to come to you on the water."

Jesus said, "Come." Then our text reads,

'So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter was in deep water -- remember, St. Matthew tells us that they were far from land -- and he was in deep trouble.

Why? Because he doubted -- because he had so little faith -- because he "noticed" the waves and did not trust the strong Word of Jesus: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

The "old Adam" within us that begins to doubt, which looks at the waves of life -- that is, focuses elsewhere than upon the promises of God -- that "old Adam" needs to be drowned, wrote Martin Luther in his Small Catechism.

We have already been drowned, you know, when we were baptized.

We Lutherans don't practice Baptism by immersion, but Luther approved of it as "a more complete sign" of what takes place in Baptism.

It is, writes Paul (Rm. 6), a burial with Christ -- and so being immersed in water symbolizes a death -- a drowning.

Well then, Luther wrote that we should go through a daily drowning of that "old Adam" so that **"daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."** [A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism, Augsburg Fortress, 1994, p. 43]

Such a daily drowning, a daily burial **"through sorrow for sin"** [Catechism, 1994], is possible only because of Our Lord's death and burial.

He died the death of utter separation from His Heavenly Father in the mystery of the cross. He rose to life again to demonstrate His total power over death, and He now gives us His life. That's how He rescues drowning doubters.

**Second Point: Our Lord Calms Wind and Wave for Us.**

As he began to sink Peter cried out this prayer, "Lord, save me!"

When we are in the deep waters, this can be our simple prayer: "Lord, save me!"

**V. 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him,**

Salvation, rescue, comes only from God through our Lord Jesus.

**"32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased."**

Some years ago a Russian submarine sank off the coast of Russia in 600 feet of water.

The only way they could finally get rescue to that sub was by a robot.

That robot saved seven men of that crew, but only seven.

God pulls us out of the sea of our sin, not from a distance, not by a robot, but by a Man, Jesus, who plunges into the suffering and death that traps us still today.

And he saves not seven, but all humankind.

All who trust that Word of promise and cry out as Peter did, "Lord, save me!" are pulled out, no longer dripping death, but baptized by forgiving grace.

**Third point: Now Our Response is to Worship and Praise our Savior.**

**v. 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."**

Here we are again today in the Nave of this church.

'Nave' means ship -- the symbolism of our church buildings has from the beginning reminded

God's people of our journey over the wide sea of this world in the safe ark of the church.

Here we have the high privilege to worship Him, saying as did the disciples, **"Truly, you are the Son of God."**

Today let us say that in our hearts as we come to the Sacrament of the Altar: **"Truly, you are the Son of God,"** and, **"You promise to meet us here in this Holy Meal."**

**Conclusion: (OK, Here comes the quiz.)**

So, what does this story mean to you? Rescue for drowning doubters? ... Yes.

But more, it means that we find God only where He has promised to be found, in Word and Sacraments, not in the winds & waves of secular progressivism and materialism.

It means: although extreme forces are against us, keep your eye on Jesus and hear His promise, **"... it is I; do not be afraid."**

It means to trust the Man who walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

And so we should have as our hymn of the day that song, from not so long ago, by Gene Mac Lellen:

**Put your hand in the hand of the man Who stilled the water.**

**Put your hand in the hand of the man Who calmed the sea.**

**Take a look at yourself, And you can look at others differently,**

**By puttin' your hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee!**

**Put out your hand!!**

S.D.g.

-- The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.