

PENTECOST 10 (PROPER 14), AUGUST 9, 2020

Rev. Roger A. Erdman

Lectionary Readings: Job 38:4-18; Psalm 18:1-16; Romans 10:5-17; Matthew 14:22-33

Sermon Title: *What Can You Do with a Little Faith?*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 14th chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, short of Jesus raising the dead back to life, the act of walking on water has to be one of the most astounding miracles imaginable. So, as we consider this miraculous event of Jesus and Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee, which miracle would you like to see today?

- Would you like to see Jesus walk on water, so you'd know He's really God and everything He says and promises is true?
- Or would you really like to trust in those promises and take a few steps on the water yourself, like Peter did?

In answer to those questions:

- It takes a lot of faith to believe that Jesus is really God without ever seeing any proof.
- It takes a lot of faith to trust the promises of God just walking through this life without ever trying to walk on water.
- It takes a lot of faith, and most of the time we don't think we have enough faith.

Jesus called Peter "*you of little faith*" (v 31). When Jesus makes him walk on the water, He shows Peter what God is able to do with a little faith.

I. Now seeing how Jesus shows Peter what God is able to do with little faith, what's the first thing God does with our little faith? He guards and protects it. The Gospel for today starts with Jesus guarding the faith of the disciples by taking them away from a situation that would've been harmful to their faith.

Huge crowds were following Jesus, mostly for the wrong reasons. Jesus had just fed more than five thousand people. John tells us in his account of the Gospel that, they wanted to take Jesus and make Him king (John 6:15).

If that would've happened, Jesus' disciples would've gone from fisherman to instant celebrities. That would've been good for their egos, but not so good for their faith. However, as we have it, the faith of the disciples would eventually grow to the point where they wouldn't be swayed by the flattery of the crowds, but it wasn't there yet.

Earlier, Jesus had quoted a passage from Isaiah: "*A smoldering wick He will not quench*" (Matthew 12:20, cf. Isaiah 42:3). In those words of Isaiah, Jesus in a sense cupped His hand around the flickering faith of these fishermen and removed them from temptation. In the opening words of our Gospel Reading, we see how Jesus did that in these words: "*Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds*" (v 22).

As well, Jesus knows the things that are devastating to our faith and directs our lives in such a way as to shield us when our little faith could be snuffed out. We may wonder why God doesn't lead us to situations that make us rich or famous or important in the eyes of the world.

Though some things are good for our egos and bank accounts, they may not be very good for our faith. Therefore, Jesus sends us down different paths, so that God can guard and protect our little faith.

II. The second thing God does with our little faith is cause it to grow and increase. The disciples must've wondered how their faith would have a chance to grow out on the lake that day. They were out on the water because Jesus had told them to get in the boat and go to the other side.

However, though obeying His order, it was getting them nowhere, except battered by the waves. Earlier, Jesus had calmed a storm to protect them, while in the boat with them (cf. Matthew 8:23-27). But this time Jesus wasn't in the same boat.

Here, the disciples weren't doing so well. They were afraid. And when Jesus came walking up to them, they became terrified, thinking He was a ghost. Then they recognized Jesus when He spoke familiar words: "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid*" (v 27). And Peter wanted to be sure: "*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*" (v 28).

Jesus, here, tests Peter and tells him to come to Him – on the water. With his eyes on Jesus, Peter does it. He actually walks on water.

How many times have we lamented that our faith isn't strong enough to do some great and miraculous thing? But, when we stop and think about it, Jesus places plenty of challenges in front of us.

He challenges us in our worship, our prayer, our giving, and our living. You see, He challenges our little faith so it can be built into a strong faith. Even the little faith of Peter was enough to receive this miracle, as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. Because the miracle was never in Peter, it was Jesus working through Peter.

The writer to the Hebrews writes: “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2 NIV). So, when you take up God’s challenge to serve Him:

- Don’t even look at the things that are against you, especially in these days of pandemic, violence and hatred in our country.
- Don’t wonder if *your* faith is big enough.

Therefore, this miracle wasn’t about the strength of Peter’s faith. Peter’s faith was *little*, not much at all. This miracle – like all miracles – is all Jesus. So, keep your eyes on Jesus. Know that His power is enough to work not just in *Him*, but also in *you* and *me* to increase and strengthen our faith.

III. Now, faith is sometimes described as the hand that receives God’s salvation. In this case, Peter called out – even with his little faith: “*Lord, save me!*” And Jesus reached for him and pulled him back up and saved him. That’s what faith can do, a little faith or a large faith, as long as it’s faith in Jesus. It receives the salvation Jesus has won for us.

You see all faith in Jesus is faith in that: That He has won salvation for you. Therefore, faith in Jesus is faith for His deliverance from drowning in all of life’s situations. It’s faith that He’ll be with you when you’re ill, faith that if you should perish, you’ll be with the Lord.

Therefore, faith in Jesus is never just faith in a generic sense: “*He’s going to somehow make everything turn out okay.*” Rather, faith in Jesus is always that He’s God’s Son Who brought you back together to God. By His death on the cross, Jesus restored your hopeless separation from God.

If the sin that separated you from God hadn’t been removed by Jesus’ cross, there’d be no hand of God reaching out to you for anything. But now that you’re back together with God by His Son’s atoning death:

- He’s *always* there with a saving hand.
- He saves you.
- He’s there for the sufferings and trials in your lives.
- And He gives you eternal life.

So, don’t consider it bad to be called a person of little faith. Even a little faith in the Lord is more valuable than a lot of faith in anyone or anything else.

Now we said there were two miracles on the sea that day: Jesus walking on the water and Peter walking on the water. Maybe there were three miracles. Yes, I believe there was a third miracle. It was a miracle that Peter learned the lesson about faith so well.

Later, when he wrote his first epistle, First Peter, Peter assured his readers what God could do with a little faith. He never mentioned the few steps he took on the water with his own little faith, but he mentioned all three of the things God does with our little faith:

- How God protects our faith. Peter greets his readers in chapter one as those “*who by God’s power are being guarded through faith*” (1 Peter 1:5).
- How God strengthens our faith. Here Peter writes that trials and problems come so “*the tested genuineness of your faith . . . may be found*” (1 Peter 1:7).
- How God gives us eternal life, which is received by faith. And you and me, as believers, are as Peter writes: “*obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls*” (1 Peter 1:9).

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, Peter might’ve only had a little faith, but he walked on the water. Too, with even a little faith, you’ll be amazed at where God makes you walk today.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!