

Matthew 14:22-33

One thing this narrative most certainly does not teach us is how to walk on water. It actually teaches just the opposite; that we are not able to walk on water. Simon Peter thinks he can. “*Come*,” says Jesus. So Peter gets out of the boat and he comes to Jesus on the water. But just because Jesus commands something does not mean that we are able to do it. He commands us to love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourself. But we can’t do it, no more than we can walk on water.

What if Peter had made it? What if he had managed to keep faith, ignore the wind and the fury of the waves, and reach Jesus? Had the other disciples in the boat been placing wagers, they would have known better than to bet on Peter in this way. Peter couldn’t make it. Nor could they. Nor could we. Isn’t this why Jesus said, “*Come*”? Not to reward him with a pat on the back if he could do it; to show him that he could not do it.

So back in the boat, we’re not told, but what do you think is going through the minds of the other disciples? “Who does Peter think he is out there on the water!” “Come on Peter, you can do it!” “There’s no way!” “What a show off!” It is easy to criticize when you’re not in someone else’s shoes. But in truth, they were...in Peter’s shoes; and so were we. Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water toward Jesus as our champion; as the champion of the entire human race. If he can make it, we can make it. But if he can’t...well...

Peter’s failure is our failure. We’re no different from him. How many times have we tried to walk on water only to sink beneath the waves? We make a commitment, maybe to be more faithful as a Christian; to be a better spouse, parent, or child. We get out of the boat glowing with confidence. We start off well. But then we see the wind and the waves and we begin to sink.

It happens to all of us. We’re not made to walk on water. We don’t have what it takes to ignore all the troubles in life that come at us like crashing waves, and still keep on walking. None of us has perfect faith. Only Jesus does. Which is why He walks without sinking. Oh we think that He walks on the water because He is God. He walks on water because, as the Son of God, He completely and perfectly trust in His heavenly Father to uphold Him.

If we had the faith of Jesus, we could walk on water. But we don’t have it, which is why we sink beneath the waves. We sink in our marriage. We sink in our duties as parents, and as children. We sink in our responsibilities as church members, and as the pastor. We sink in our daily walk as Christians. “*O you of little faith!*” Jesus says to Peter. But these words are just as much for us.

Little faith...faith the size of a mustard seed...is all that is needed until the waves begin crashing over us. A little faith holds on to a little Jesus. Which is fine when our daily walk is pleasant, peaceful, and not on top of the stormy sea of life. A little faith grasping a little Jesus works well until the waves around us become bigger than Jesus.

I hear Christians say, “I just need to keep my faith...I need to keep going and keep trusting in Jesus.” But that noble thought didn’t help Peter much, did it? This story teaches us that none of us has what it takes to keep going. None of us is able to keep faith on the stormy sea of life.

It doesn't take faith to believe that Jesus can save a sinner. It does take faith to believe that He can, and will, save a sinner like me.

Thrashing around in the sea, Peter could have cried, "I've got this! I'll be fine...just give me a minute!" Those who believe in this way today will perish. The truth is that we do not have it. We will not be fine. Our whole lifetime is not long enough to pull ourselves up out of the waves. Jesus' hand is reaching out to all in the preaching of the Gospel and in the blessed Sacraments. Right here today, it's reaching out. Those who ignore His hand; who say, "I'll be fine. Thanks Jesus, but no thanks," will not make it.

Thrashing around the sea, Peter might have thought, "I've got to try harder because Jesus will not help me now...not after I took my eyes off of Him." That's where so many are today. They're ashamed. They were walking well. But they took their eyes off Jesus. Life got in the way. Their troubles became crashing waves.

It's a sign of weakness to ask for help. But unless we become weak, we cannot be saved. "*Lord, save me!*" cried Peter. This is faith. Not trying harder. Not looking for more strength somewhere. Looking to Jesus. Save *me*, Jesus! *I* need help! *I* need a Savior. I am too weak to save myself. If You don't save me, I will perish!

No storm can prevent Jesus from coming to us. No little faith can keep Him from reaching out His hand to us. We do not grab Him; He grabs us. He's grabbing you right now. His hand is reaching in through your ears to save you. The very hands that were pierced with nails on the cross are here for you today, in Word and in Sacrament. And you need them. You need Jesus, as do I.

Today you and I cried out with Peter, "*Lord, save me!*" when we confessed, "I am a poor, miserable sinner...be merciful to me, and forgive me." He is merciful. He does forgive. He forgives you. You, who are so weak and helpless; you, who are constantly sinking beneath the waves; you are the one He forgives.

And pulling you up out of your sin, and out of the waves, does He send you off on your own? Is that what you want? To walk off by yourself now, saying, "Thanks, Jesus, for Your helping hand; I've got it from here for a while." No you don't. You don't have it. And you never will. Until you and I learn how weak we are, and that we need Jesus...His hand of grace in His Word and His Sacraments, not just now and then, but continually, daily and weekly, we are living in danger on the stormy sea of life.

Be weak therefore. Be helpless. Admit the "littleness" of your faith. And keep crying, "*Lord, save me!*" He will. He will keep you here in this place where His hand always reaches out. He will never let go of you. He will bring you safely into the boat; safely through the storm; safely into heaven. Amen.