

Sermon for August 31, 2014 - 12th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 14:22-33 (NKJV)

Theme: Truly, He is the Son of God

- 1) *Who knows our toil,*
- 2) *Whose divine presence stills our fear,*
- 3) *Who welcomes our trust,*
- 4) *Who delivers us from doubt,*
- 5) *Who grants us peace.*

²² Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. ²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸ And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." ²⁹ So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

It doesn't matter how long we've been a Christian, we all struggle with understanding who God is and how much we can trust him. The problem is our sinful flesh which either keeps us from God's Word, or leads us to misunderstand it.

This was the problem the disciples faced. Right before our text takes place we read that Jesus wanted to feed a crowd of more than 5000 people. Even after Jesus fed the crowd we read in the Gospel of Mark that the disciples did not understand the meaning of this miracle and how it revealed Christ's true nature (cf. Mark 6:52).

Now, before we shake our heads and wonder how those disciples didn't get it, let's take a good look at ourselves: do we always get it? Do we live our lives with such certainty that Jesus is the Son of God that we never worry, doubt or fear? Truth be told, we don't.

But thankfully the Lord is patient with us - just as he was with the disciples. In all patience he directs our lives in such a way so that we might learn to know him better.

Let us consider how the Lord does this in our lives by seeing how he led the disciples to a greater understanding of who he is, under the theme: **Truly, He is the Son of God:** 1) *Who knows our toil,* 2) *Whose divine presence stills our fears,* 3) *Who welcomes our trust,* 4) *Who delivers us from doubt,* 5) *Who grants us peace.*

Part One: Who knows our toil.

Our sermon text takes place in the evening, shortly after Jesus fed the crowd of over 5000 people. We read:

²² Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Just picture the disciples - laboring alone on the stormy sea at Jesus' command. The Bible does not tell us that they were in any immediate danger, but (being night time) they were most certainly exhausted from all their labor - and probably somewhat scared. And where was Jesus?

He was on a high mountain, alone with his Father in prayer. Even though he was apart from his disciples, that doesn't mean he didn't know or care about their toil. He did know and care. How? Because he is the Son of God.

Like the disciples, we Christians go forth at Christ's command - laboring for him. When the storms of life beat against us, we continue to labor on as best we can. But with the wind of problems and difficulty blowing in opposition we easily become exhausted. We are tired, and Jesus seems so far away from us. He is up in heaven. Does he know? Does he care? Yes, he does. He sees everything because he is the Son of God. He, in fact, is interceding on our behalf with God the Father. Just like with his disciples on the lake, he won't let us fail. He will come to help.

Part Two: Whose divine presence stills our fears

We read: *²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.*

When we look at the disciples' reaction now it might seem a little foolish, but put yourselves in their sandals. It's 3 am and you've been rowing hours - getting practically nowhere. Your 3.5 miles out to sea with the wind and waves beating against your boat. You are exhausted but know that if you stop piloting your boat against the waves, you will probably capsize. All of a sudden, you see a figure of a man walking towards you on the dark water? Who of us wouldn't be freaking out?

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

Just as the Lord came to his disciples on the stormy sea, so also the Lord comes to us.

Our life may be full of labor. We may feel like we are getting nowhere - alone, scared and at wits' end. But the Lord is near. He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments to reassure us that he is the almighty Son of God who has power to help. "Be of good cheer. Take courage," he says, "It's me - your dear Savior and almighty God. I see what you are going through and know your labor. Don't be afraid of me for I come in love. I have come to give you strength and to calm your troubled heart. I have come to tell you that your labor in the LORD is not in vain. I will not let you sink. I will not let you drown in a sea of trouble. Trust in me, my love and my forgiveness. I have come to give you true rest. I will comfort and console you, for I am the Son of God - your Savior."

Part Three: Who welcomes our trust.

Hearing this news seems too good to be true! Is Jesus really with us? Oh, if the Son of God is by our side what can't we accomplish? Perhaps it was thoughts like these that led Peter to say:

"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

Was Peter doubting that it was the Lord? If he doubted, then why did he jump out of the boat? Did Peter fully trust it was Jesus he saw, who is the divine Son of God? If he fully trusted it was the Lord, then why did He ask: "Lord, if it is You . . ."

I believe that Peter's emotions and thoughts were all aswirl - like ours often are. He was convinced it was the Lord, but - at the same time - Peter wanted to be sure. If it was Jesus, then he truly is the Son of God. If it was Jesus, he could run to him in faith - even on water, if the Lord bade him to do so.

The Lord welcomed Peter's faith - as conflicted as it may have been. He wanted to strengthen it that Peter might truly believe that he is the almighty Son of God.

²⁹ *So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.*

The Lord loves it when we put our trust in him and his Word. He promises to accomplish amazing things through us as we hold on to him in faith. He promises to hear our prayers and give us what we ask for in faith. The only times he may not give us what we ask for is when we doubt, ask for something sinful, or if what we ask for conflicts with his good and gracious will for us.

What Peter requested may seem foolish - but the LORD didn't think his faith was. The Lord said, "Come" and because the Lord said he could do it, Peter trusted he could. And he did.

May the Lord grant us the faith of Peter, a faith that is not afraid to ask boldly, and that takes Jesus at his Word when he says: "Yes." This is the kind of faith Jesus loves.

Part Four: Who delivers us from doubt.

Unfortunately we are all weak and sinful. It is so easy for us to let things distract us from trusting Jesus as we ought.

We read that Peter, *when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"*³¹ *And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Why did Peter doubt? Why do we? Oh, how frail is our conviction and how easily we waver. What Jesus said of Peter is true of all of us. None of us possess the great faith we desire ourselves to have. It is all too easy to take our eyes off of Jesus.

And see the danger we are in when we do that. Peter immediately began to sink. Taking his eyes off of Jesus could have cost him his life. But even this danger was from God's gracious hand. The distress woke Peter's faith up. It led him to cry out the prayer that every Christian should be ready to pray: "Lord, save me!"

God promises: *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.* (Psalms 50:15 NKJV) This is exactly what Peter did: his soul cried out to his Savior in faith, and his Savior immediately showed his mercy by grabbing hold of Peter and saving him.

As the Lord saved Peter, so often he saves us. Sometimes the distressing and dangerous times he allows in our life are exactly the kind of times we need to wake our spirits up, to cry to the Lord in faith. And the Lord hears our cries. He sends his hand to grab hold of us and keep us from sinking. For some the rescue is immediate. For others, the Lord may take his time to accomplish his will. But no matter how long it takes, the Lord will not let us sink. He will rescue us. And when he does, our faith is strengthened.

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Why do we doubt? We have no reason to. Jesus is the all powerful Son of God, who keeps all his promises. May this truth lead us to pray: *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24 NKJV)

Part Five: Who grants us peace.

Our text continues: ³² *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

Jesus gave the disciples the peace they desperately needed and desired. The wind stopping was no coincidence. The Lord did it. And that is not the only thing He did. We read in the Gospel of John that, after Jesus got into the boat, *immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.* (John 6:21 NKJV)

Is it any wonder that *those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God"?*

This is exactly what Jesus wanted his disciples to know, believe and confess. It is also exactly what Jesus wants us to know, believe and confess. Faith in Jesus brings relief. It brings peace. Even though the storms of life strike and we find ourselves toiling away, the LORD does not want us to forget that he knows and cares. He sees what we are going through and comes to us through the Word and Sacraments to calm our fears and give us relief. He welcomes our trust in him and works - even in the distress we face - to deliver us from doubt. Why? So he can give us the peace we so desperately need.

The peace the Lord gives us is a peace that the world cannot give. It is not necessarily the immediate cessation of all our troubles and trials on this earth. But I can tell you most assuredly that the peace Jesus offers us will absolutely end in deliverance. When we least expect it, it will happen. When we reach the other side, we will certainly confess with the disciples: "Truly you are the Son of God! Praise be to you for your love, power and deliverance." Amen.