

How Can I Cross This Lake?

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

I noticed, for the first time, in preparation for today a very interesting word in this text. "Immediately Jesus MADE the disciples get into the boat." This was not something that they were volunteering to do. Jesus shoved them in the boat and said, "go, get out of here." We hear no promises that He would meet up with them on the other side. He simply shoved them afloat, not allowing any argument on the matter, while He went off to pray. So as the disciples went off into this windstorm - the text says it was "against it" - blowing the opposite way that they needed to go - what do you imagine they were saying to themselves? "Couldn't we have waited until tomorrow?" Matthew tells us that they continued against this contrary wind until the fourth watch. That was between three and six in the morning. They could have been out there for about 12 hours. Blindly they kept on rowing - wondering to themselves, "why did Jesus send us out here?"

This is in many ways typical of our lives. We get in the boat. We start rowing. We have a

destination in mind. Yet the wind constantly beats against us. The waves of life wear us out. We set our minds on children, retirement, vacations, and so many other things - but the winds of nature and the waves of life slow us down to a crawl. We get exhausted as we try to get to our destination. We end up in the middle of a lake that we would have much rather just walked around.

Think about it. In your wildest dreams, how many of you planned from childhood on being in the position you are in today? Did you think - when you were ten years old - that you would have ended up with in North Highlands? Did you dream of working the same monotonous job - or of being President? None of us plan on having back problems. We don't put in our agendas to live paycheck to paycheck. We don't always plan on having children or getting married or many other things. This isn't the way we planned it. But it's not an accident either. In the back of our minds we realize that there are no accidents in life. Just as Jesus shoved the disciples into the middle of the lake, Proverbs 16:9 says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." We know in the end that God is in control. Like it or not - God put us here. God gave you your job. He gave you your spouse. He gave you your health. Even in our sin - He directs what happens - seemingly good or bad. The question is - "how do we get through the storm and get to the other side?"

Let's keep in mind: first things first. Don't give up. Keep on plugging away. Even though it was the fourth watch and the disciples were exhausted, they didn't give up. But they were running out of juice doing what Jesus told them to do. As husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, and retirees, God calls on all of us to "do all that we do to the glory of God." Those day to day chores get to be awfully difficult at times - as if nature itself were plowing against us with all it's might. Keep plugging away.

But what do we do when we are exhausted? Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Look at what happened. As the disciples were stuck in neutral, Jesus decided to come down from the mountain and go to the disciples. In a powerful display of might, Jesus calmly and yet steadily walked on water some three and a half miles across the Sea of Galilee - and found the disciples in the middle of the lake. In the

midst of their struggling and going nowhere, Jesus was easily able to overcome nature and reach these exhausted creatures of His.

Instead of being overjoyed at the sign of their Lord, When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. Our world is one in which we are very accustomed to nature. We know the nature of things. When you turn on the water on a hot summer day it will run out of the hose. It's what water does. When you put your wet swimsuit in the sun on a hot summer day, it will dry out. These things are natural. We take pride in the way we can move the earth, make reservoirs, send satellites into space, and do so many other things within this realm of nature. We enjoy making measurements and figuring out the science of things. It makes us feel powerful.

The disciples couldn't ignore this Being that was walking right towards them. All of them saw it, and they were terrified. They didn't know what it was, and for that reason they were scared to death. Jesus didn't come to terrify his disciples. It wasn't as if He was laughing to Himself as they were screaming in fear. We can see that from Jesus' response. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Since they didn't recognize Him, Jesus used His well known voice and simply said to them, "It is I." If the disciples were wondering if they were sunk since Jesus wasn't physically there, Jesus was saying to them, "nothing can separate me from you." As we mentioned last week, when a child is growing up he sometimes has a favorite blanket. It's usually soft and cuddly. The feeling of it gives him or her assurance a constancy in life. That's what Jesus was assuring the disciples and us of. "I am." Jesus put us in the middle of this sea. No matter where you are - you may not have planned on being here you may have been spinning your wheels for hours and days - frustrated as all get out. In the midst of this, Jesus comes to you and says, "I am." Jesus is not just some cuddly soft little blanket. Jesus is the LORD - the same one that rescued the Israelites out of slavery. Since He can walk on water, that tells me that HE is still in charge - and even in charge of nature. He has not abandoned me - and shoved me out to sea just to drown!

In comes Peter - ah yes, Peter - the one who always likes to throw himself into the situation and get his hands rough and dirty - experience it all. The

rest of the disciples seemed content to sit in that boat - but Peter wasn't satisfied with that. He wanted a piece of the action. "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." Peter didn't just jump in the water. He didn't assume that just because Jesus was walking on water - that HE could then walk on water. He asked for a specific Word - a specific command - from Jesus - to do so. It would have been at worst arrogant or at least ignorant for Peter to go jumping in that stormy water without a Word from Christ. His faith rested on the Word. So he sought the Word and promise of Jesus so that he could experience this miracle and come closer to Christ even more so.

What should we make of the other disciples? Were they to be judged as lazy and afraid - not as zealous for the LORD because they didn't try to come to Him? Every Christian is different. I believe we could use more Peters - people who are willing and eager to be commanded to do outrageous and even impossible things. Too many of us are afraid of falling into the water. With all the other disciples watching from the boat, we don't want to be judged as showboats and we definitely don't want to fall in the sea while everyone is watching. So we sit in the confines of our boats - happy and secure knowing that Jesus is here with us - not wanting to get our toes wet.

Jesus blessed Peter's eagerness with the simple command, "come." With this one Word he was putting His blessing on Peter's feet and his path - encouraging and even enabling him to come. It's just like the Word that goes with baptism - God's Word promises us forgiveness of sins and salvation in that water. The same kind of promise is found in the two words - "for you" - in Holy Communion. We take the body and blood with our ears ever tentative to the words connected to the bread and wine. We know that even though we are sinful and deserving God's wrath, we have been promised forgiveness in the Supper and encouraged by Jesus Himself to come. It's the Word that also encourages us to come to church. It's the Word that drives us to give our firstfruits - to send missionaries to foreign lands in the hopes that God will produce converts to Christianity. It's the Word that leads us to rejoice at death, knowing that our loved ones in Christ have just entered an eternity in heaven. These actions and attitudes are miracles that God performs through His encouraging Word.

With the Word and command of Christ, Peter stepped out of the boat - and he walked on water! Amazing! Peter achieved the impossible - he walked on water! Imagine what else could be done with such a faith! Jesus said that we could move mountains with faith as small as a mustard seed!

Is Peter a great example of faith? What did Jesus say? But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" After all was said and done, Jesus only had to say to Peter, "you of little faith." Why? Because Peter SAW the wind and feared. Faith is being sure of what you DON'T see. Peter's eyes saw the wind and the waves. He didn't remain focused on Jesus - and His word and command. Only seconds after having the promise and command of Jesus, he feared and he fell. Luther's explanation of the First Commandment says we should "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." If Peter would have had a strong faith - he would have trusted that he could walk all the way to Jesus with no problem at all. He didn't trust Jesus' words. His faith was only little.

The disciples and Jesus ended up at their destination. The point isn't, "how do I walk on water," but "how do I get across the lake?" What's the answer? Jesus brought them across the lake. When you find yourself scared to death at nature's roar, sinking in front of the waves, look to Christ. If He could get all the disciples across the sea safely, He can take care of you as well. Remember the object of your faith is Christ, not you. Remember also that the strongest faith is not found in only looking at the glorious miracles of Christ - but the roughest dirtiest ones. Our faith is strongest when we can see Jesus feet nailed in a cross instead of walking on water. It is on the cross that we find our salvation completed. It is only at the cross that we are saved from drowning in a lake of fire and not just a lake of water. The strongest faith is to be willing to let Jesus watch you drown, and still believe that He is the LORD - to say to Jesus, "LORD, save me," even though you know you're going to drown. The strongest faith is found when we believe that even though we sink under the sea of this life, one day we like Christ will walk out of the grave, since Jesus conquered death. Only by calling to Christ as our Savior will we be able to make it through the winds and waves of life, death, Satan, and hell itself.

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