
It's Jesus! Don't Be Afraid! (Matthew 14:22-33)
8/27/2017bug Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



C. S. Lewis wrote about a man who was about to go through surgery. And he knew that the doctors were capable. He knew that the anesthesiologist was an expert. He knew that the surgeon would not start operating until the drugs had numbed and put him under. He knew that he wouldn't feel any pain during the surgery. He knew all that.

As he was going into the surgery, however, the fears and doubts started creeping in. What if they start the surgery before I'm under? What if they use the wrong drugs and I'm awake the whole time!? What if it's incredibly painful?

Doubt is a normal part of life. We know something is true, but then we get scared and think, "What if it's not?" We often are just like that guy facing surgery. We know there's nothing to fear, but we still doubt. We still are afraid.

Today, we see that this is the life of a Christian. God gives us his promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God assures us that these blessings are ours through the Word, through our baptism, and through the Lord's Supper. Yet doubt remains our constant companion. We continue to doubt God. We put ourselves into dangerous situations with our sins instead of simply trusting God at his Word. But Jesus is always there to again assure us that he is the Son of God and he will save us. Today, our God again reminds us: *It's Jesus! Don't Be Afraid!*

Our Gospel lesson today shows us this dynamic of continued doubt from God's people, and continued assurance from our God. In our lesson, we find the disciples in a dangerous place, in a boat in the middle of a lake during a vicious storm. Matthew speaks about this storm almost like it's alive. He says that the waves were "torturing" the boat, and that the wind was "opposed to" or "against" the disciples. This was a real attack on the disciples' faith. And honestly, what better time for Satan to tempt the disciples to replace their faith in Jesus with fear?

So there the disciples were, in the terror of Satan's attack, in this boat being tossed back and forth by the waves. That would be frightening! The disciples were falling for that temptation to replace faith with fear. The doubts were creeping in. But

then notice how Jesus comes to them. Jesus comes walking on the very waters the disciples feared. Jesus comes in trampling on the very thing they thought would take their lives. Jesus shows us that he has power, not only over nature around us, but also over Satan's powers against us! We don't need to be afraid!

Notice how Jesus' words directly respond to where the disciples are. The disciples are terrified. Jesus says, "Take courage!" The disciples think Jesus is a ghost! Jesus says, "It is I." The disciples cry out in fear. Jesus says, "Don't be afraid."

But even after Jesus has walked all over the disciples' enemies, even after Jesus has given them his Word that there nothing to be afraid of, it's still not enough for Peter. Peter couldn't just take Jesus at his Word. And so Peter gives himself an extra temptation. He says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water!"

Peter, Peter. We sometimes talk about this like it was an amazing act of faith for Peter to do this, but Peter really put himself into so much more danger by walking on the water! Now he was standing on those terrifying waves! Now he was in the middle of that horrifying wind! Even as Peter walks right up to Jesus, standing on that water, he still cannot keep trusting his Savior. Soon he looks away from Jesus and back to the storm around him, and he begins to sink.

How much safer would Peter have been if he had just believed Jesus' words from the boat? How much more secure would Peter have been if he had just believed Jesus' words that it was him? How much less fear would Peter have experienced if he had just trusted Jesus' command to not be afraid? Instead, because of Peter's doubts, he found himself deeper in the storm and sinking.

In contrast to Peter's lack of faith, we see all the more clearly Jesus' power, grace, and identity. There Jesus is walking on the water. What power! There Jesus is addressing every one of the disciples' fears. What grace! There Jesus is giving Peter every chance to just believe him! Jesus could have told Peter, "Stay in the boat! I already told you it's me! What more do you need?" Instead, Jesus lets him walk on the water to show Peter and the other disciples that he really is the Son of God! Then, when Peter starts to sink, Jesus doesn't let him sink like his lack of faith deserves. Instead, Jesus immediately grabs him and gets him into the boat, and right then, the storm is simply gone. Truly, Jesus is the Son of God. Truly, we have

nothing to fear. Truly, we need do nothing but say, “Lord, save me.” Because Jesus is strong enough to save.

We often don’t feel that’s enough though, do we? Yeah, we read about Jesus in the Bible. Yeah, we know he’s the Son of God. Yeah, he saves his people. But can he save me? Can he really save us today? Can he really get us through the storms of life? The doubts come our way.

We ask, “Will God really take care of me?” And Jesus says, “How little is a sparrow worth? Yet not one of them is outside of God’s care. You are worth more than many sparrows! I died for you to prove that! Will I not provide your daily needs? I know the exact number of hairs on your head! Why do you doubt?”

We look at the state of the world and we ask, “Is God really in control?” Jesus says, “Fear not! I have overcome the world. In fact, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me! I still rule all things for the good of my church and one day, on Judgment Day, all will be made right again. You don’t need to be afraid.”

We ask, “Can God really forgive me?” Jesus says, “I came to this world to save the world. When I died on the cross, I said, ‘It is finished,’ and I meant it. Your sins are paid for in full. You are forgiven. Heaven is your home! Don’t Be Afraid!”

Yet we still doubt, just like Peter, don’t we? We tempt ourselves. We put ourselves into dangerous situations because of our doubts. God says to honor his Word and gladly hear and learn it, but we say, “Well, I don’t need to be in God’s Word regularly. That’s for other people.” Do we really think Satan is going to miss the opportunity to use the busyness of life to push our thoughts away from Jesus? Suddenly we find ourselves tortured by the waves of life, asking God, “Why?” But if we had just trusted God that his Word is for our good, if we had just spent time in the Word like God says, he would have given us the spiritual wisdom to get through or even avoid those problems in the first place.

Or we say, “I know God wants me to love my neighbor as myself, but I don’t really need to do that.” Do we really think Satan is going to miss the opportunity to make us more self-centered? Suddenly we find ourselves in broken relationships, in divorces, in ruined families, and we think, “God, how could you let this happen?” But if we had just trusted God that I ought to love others as myself, many of those

problems may have never happened or we would better understand how to deal with those situations now that they are here.

We doubt that God is who he says he is. We put ourselves into sinful situations. We put ourselves into more danger than we needed to be. Suddenly, we are out there on the waves with Peter, staring the storm right in the face, and we are terrified. Suddenly, we find ourselves just like Peter unable to trust Jesus even when he's staring us right in the face, because we are so preoccupied with the storms in our lives. Jesus could let us sink, because that's what our lack of faith deserves. But he doesn't. He reaches out, takes our hand, and saves us again.

When you feel yourself sinking beneath the waves of your chaotic life, when you feel like the winds of the entire world are against you, when you feel Satan's accusations that you don't deserve heaven, just know where to look. Weak and small as your faith may be, strong as your doubts and sin may be, call to Jesus. "Lord, save me!" That's all you need, because Jesus is all you need. He is always strong enough to save.

You will always have doubts. It's a part of faith. When those doubts come your way, answer them with who your God is. When your sinful nature tries to push Jesus away with your fears, remember what you know to be true. God is all-powerful and all-wise. God is good and merciful. Jesus has died on the cross to pay for all of your sins. Jesus rose from the dead to make you perfect in his sight and to open eternal life in heaven for you. All these things are true, so why doubt? Instead of doubt, simply remember: It's Jesus! Don't Be Afraid! Amen.