

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 9, 2020

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

Fear and Authority

Mathew 14:22–33

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

When the disciples saw [Jesus] walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It’s a ghost!” . . . He said, “Take heart; it is I. Don’t be afraid.” . . . Peter said, “Lord, if it’s You, command me to come to You on the water.” . . . He said, “Come.” . . . Peter cried out, “Lord, save me.” . . . Jesus took hold of him, saying, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt.” . . . Those in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.” (vv 26–33)

The disciples probably had their doubts about Jesus

even *before* **He made them get into the boat and cross to the other side** (v 22).

Here’s a quick recap of what had happened recently and might have fed their doubts:

- Back home in Nazareth Jesus had been met with unbelief and dishonor.
- He did exactly zero miracles there.
- Then friend and forerunner John the Baptist lost his head.

In short, things weren’t going particularly well for Jesus and His followers.

So I could see the disciples wondering about the extent of Jesus’ authority,
wondering about His lack of authority in Nazareth,
wondering about how His authority measured up to that of ruler Herod,
the one who’d beheaded John.

Wondering, Is Jesus really who we say we believe He is?

Can He really do the things we believe He can do?

His words of assurance are nice,
but can they really be trusted?

3.

And then Jesus made them get into that boat to cross to the other side

at night

in that weather

while He stayed behind on land.

And they do.

But I bet they had their doubts.

I bet they had their doubts when the boat **was a long way from the land,**
when it was **beaten by the waves,**
when **the wind was against them** (v 24).

If you want to know the damage wind can do,
just take a peek at the tree that fell in my yard this week.
Then imagine being on the water in a storm like that.

Still, this isn't like that other time when Jesus was with them in the boat but asleep,
when they were afraid of perishing as the boat took on water,
when they woke Jesus up with their panicked cries for help.

This time, though they were being tormented by the waves,
we aren't told that they cried for help
or were relieved when the wind stopped.

Maybe they didn't cry for help
because Jesus was so far away
and they weren't sure that he could hear them or help them,
because they weren't sure about His authority.

Notice that in today's reading, the storm didn't make them afraid.
The storm wasn't the problem.

The problem was Jesus, or rather their lack of faith in Jesus,
who **came to them in the fourth watch of the night,**
walking on the sea (v 25),
who came to them,
even though they hadn't cried for help.

That's what scared them —
not the storm but this thing coming to them across the stormy sea.

They were terrified,
confused,
shaken.

They said, **"It's a ghost!"** (v 26), a phantom, something supernatural.
They cried out in fear (v 26).

Can you blame them?

They weren't expecting Jesus to be there.
He hadn't told them He was coming.

He simply showed up unannounced.
 Maybe that's why Jesus doesn't rebuke them,
 maybe that's why He encourages them and reassures them,
"Take heart; it is I. Don't be afraid" (v 27).

2.

That's when Peter (who else?) opens his big mouth:
**"Lord, if it's You,
 command me to come to You on the water"** (v 28).

If it's you . . .
 Jesus just said that it's Him.
 Isn't that enough for Peter?
 Shouldn't that be enough for us?
"Take heart; it is I. Don't be afraid" (v 27).

If it's you . . .
 Almost like a challenge.
 Prove it to me.
 I don't trust Your words of assurance.
 Give me evidence.
Command me to come to You on the water (v 28).

Be careful what you ask of God.
 He might just do it.
 You want evidence?
 You want Me to prove it?
"Come" (v 29).
 A single, authoritative word.
 Jesus said, **"Come"** (v 29).
 And Peter does.
 Impulsive, big-mouth Peter steps out of the boat.
 He **walked on water and came to Jesus** (v 29).

He came to Jesus until **he saw the wind**, then **he was afraid** (v 30).
 Doubts quickly rise up again.
 His lack of faith gives way to fear.
 Peter begins **to sink** (v 30).
 Now He calls out again,
 not to challenge Jesus but to find salvation,
"Lord, save me" (v 30).

And Jesus does.

He **immediately reached out His hand and took hold of Him.**

He grabs the sinking doubter and pulls Him up.

He says, **“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

Why did you doubt, Peter?

It was your lack of faith, wasn't it?

Your lack of faith causes you to be afraid.

The very same thing is true of us.

Jesus promises He rules over all creation.

He promises He will deliver us from all adversity.

He promises to provide for all our needs.

But it's hard to believe sometimes, isn't it?

We don't always see it,
which leads to doubts.

The result is fear.

And you know how powerful fear can be.

You know how many stupid, foolish, thoughtless, reckless things
fear can lead us to do.

What fears are causing you to sink?

Are you afraid of the coronavirus—

afraid that it's lurking around every corner waiting to attack?

Or afraid that we've hit a “new normal” and life will never be the same?

Or afraid of how tight your belt has become,

or the next round of layoffs,

or whether there'll be school this fall and what it will look like?

Or afraid of the state of our country and the upcoming elections?

Afraid that Trump might be reelected?

Afraid that Biden might win?

And what foolishness has this fear produced in your life?

Reports from the last six months reveal it.

Alcohol sales are apparently stronger than ever,

and I wouldn't be surprised if the same is true of drugs, legal or not.

Domestic abuse has been called the “shadow pandemic”;
has it knocked on your door?
Depression, suicide, and deaths of despair are on the increase.
The porn industry is prospering.
Theft often stems from financial insecurity;
perhaps you’ve felt that temptation.
Throw in anger, rage, malice, hatred, slander, and all sorts of vicious words,
especially online.

Oh, our doubt and our fear have nearly done us in.
We’re sinking so fast in these waves of sin.
We’re being pulled into the depths,
being pulled toward hell.

Lord, save me!

1.

Take heart.
Jesus is the one.
Don’t be afraid.

He’s no ghost, no phantom.
He’s the Son of God.

He comes to us as He came to the disciples on the boat:
unasked for,
sometimes unrecognizable,
but always with authority.

With all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18).

His walk on the sea gave the disciples a glimpse.
But He comes to you in an even more astonishing way —
not across the sea but from beyond the grave.
His resurrection from the dead sealed it.
Do you remember the disciples in the upper room?
Jesus appeared there, too,
and they thought He was a ghost.
But no! He’s risen from the dead.
And He promises to come again.

Jesus died for Peter.
And He died for all of us who have such little faith and so much foolishness.
He saved others;
 He wouldn't save Himself.
But now He comes— He comes!
He comes across space and time.
He comes risen from the dead.
He comes— alive and with authority.

He comes and says, "Take heart; it is I. Don't be afraid."
He's greater than our doubts.
No matter how little our faith,
 it doesn't change for an instant what He's done.
It's not about the size of our faith,
 but the greatness of our Savior.
Your lack of faith can't wash away His miracles or His mercy or His promises.

Don't be afraid.
Jesus is here.
He speaks;
 you hear His words.
He reaches out to take hold of you;
 you receive His true body and blood.
And soon you will see Him with your own eyes,
 see not a ghost but the very Son of God.
You will see Him just as He promised.
You will see Him with authority,
 coming on the clouds with angels and archangels.

Come, dear friend,
 step out of your fear and walk toward Jesus.
Fix your eyes on Him, the author and perfecter of our faith.
When the wind and the waves start to sink you,
 call out to the Savior.
Watch the news, if you must,
 but don't put your trust in reporters or in rulers,
 in the promises you read in the headlines or hear from their lips;
Jesus is the one you trust.

Worship Him without fear,
not just today, but every day,
for He has claimed you as His own
that you might live under His gracious rule now and forever.

WITH AUTHORITY, HE COMES; HE CALMS; HE BANISHES OUR FEAR.

With Peter and all the disciples, we worship Him,
saying, **“Truly You are the Son of God”** (v 33)

And it is well, oh it is well, with my soul.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.

Phil 4:7
