

## The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

August 6-7, 2011

Matthew 14:22-33

### *“Do Not Be Afraid”*

We're at the height of the summer season when lots of folks take to the water – swimming, sailing, boating, water skiing. Since we've just come off the hottest July on record, cooling off in the water is mighty inviting. But what's it like to be out on the open water when a storm hits? Even with all of the technology available to us today, summer storms can come up very suddenly and catch us off-guard. Suddenly, the wind picks up and the smooth, placid waters become dangerous. Waves are whipped up to hazardous heights. Staying out on the water becomes not only risky, but life-threatening. I have a healthy respect for water, and have never been in this kind of situation. I hope I never will. But that is the real-life situation in which the disciples find themselves in the Gospel lesson today. Caught in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a windstorm in the middle of the night, they're in grave danger of going down. Jesus comes to them, walking on the water, and rescues them from certain death. His words to them become the basis for this message: **“Do not be afraid”** (Matthew 14:27). May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

Today's Gospel reading follows Jesus' feeding of the 5000 men, plus women and children. John tells us in his account that after the crowd saw what Jesus had done, they wanted to take him by force and make him king (John 6:15). In order to escape from this misguided attempt to define who he was, the Lord put the disciples into a boat, and Jesus himself went up on a mountain to pray overnight. Crossing over the Sea of Galilee should have taken a couple of hours, but we read that the wind was against them, and it's now the fourth watch of the night; that is, between 3-6 a.m. The disciples were surely exhausted after rowing throughout the night and making no headway. Out on the open water, energy drained, a windstorm upon them, things look pretty bleak. I think we can relate to their situation. Storms in life don't always happen when we're caught out on the water. They can happen anytime, anywhere: the medical test results confirming what we feared, the job that pays our bills now in jeopardy of being downsized, trouble at home with our marriage or family, facing a major life-change that will take us in a new and uncertain direction. Maybe like those disciples we've tried and tried to forge ahead and make headway, but we're getting nowhere. And we're exhausted; at the end of our rope. It is then that Jesus comes to us – not in our strength, but in our weakness. He meets us where we are, in our greatest need. He speaks words of hope to us: **“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid”** (Matthew 14:27).

In the midst of the storms of life, we often feel terribly alone. There may be people all around us, but does anybody really care? There can be this sense of overwhelming isolation. We cry out: “Nobody really knows what I'm going through. God, do you know? Do you care?” Like Peter, we feel like we're sinking down, and there's no way out. God in Christ comes to us and reaches out his hand to raise us up. He who is Master and Lord of all creation, He who controls wind and wave, He who has loved us with an everlasting love and offered his very life upon the cross to make us his own, is with us in the storm to deliver us. His Name is Jesus, which means “He saves.” Like the angel told Joseph, **“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21). That's the kind of Savior we

have! He has saved us from what truly takes us down – sin, death, and hell. Since this is the kind of Savior we have, won't He also be with us in the storms of life to save and deliver us?

Like Peter, we also are of "little faith." That is what Jesus said to Peter after rescuing him: **"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"** (Matthew 14:31). We struggle to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and not on the storm raging around us or within us. We become distracted, our trust in Jesus falters, and we start to sink. But even then, we cry out: **"Lord, save me!"** (Matthew 14:30). This is the cry of faith – not perfect faith, not always strong faith, but faith that looks to Jesus as the Savior in the storm. He is the only One who can deliver us. At times, the Lord may in his divine wisdom choose not to deliver us. He may choose not to remove that burden from us, and that can be a very difficult thing to comprehend. But even if this is the case, He himself promises to be with us, and even if He chooses not to deliver us from the storm, even then He has not abandoned or forsaken us. Even this will be for our ultimate good and blessing. He is with us in the midst of the storm to strengthen and support us.

The net effect of Jesus' deliverance of Peter and the other disciples was that they worshiped him. Bug-eyed, mouths wide open in amazement, breathless, they can only stammer: **"Truly, you are the Son of God"** (Matthew 14:33). Only God can walk upon the water (Job 9:8). Only God can command the forces of nature and they must obey his voice (Psalm 107:29; Matthew 8:23-27). And when Jesus says to the disciples, **"It is I"** (Matthew 14:27), he is identifying himself as the One who reveals the God of Israel, who revealed himself to Moses by saying: **"I am who I am"** (Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 32:29; Isaiah 41:4, 43:10). If we want to know who that God is, we need look no further than Jesus. And what is our response when the Lord rescues and delivers us from the storms of life? Is it just, "Whew! Glad that's over. Let's get back to business as usual." Are we not changed through such experiences? Were those first disciples not changed through their experience with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee? Brothers and sisters, we too must fall down in worship and adoration, confessing to Jesus: **"Truly, you are the Son of God."** And confessing who Jesus is, we then follow where Jesus is leading.

Friends in Christ, the Lord Jesus who walked on the water and rescued the disciples, who died on Calvary's cross and rose in triumph over death and the grave, is the same Lord Jesus who promises to be with us as we navigate the storms of this life. What Jesus said to his disciples then he says to his disciples today: **"Do not be afraid."** Thanks be to God. Amen.