

7 August 2011
Pentecost 8

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Music to His Ears”

Text: Matthew 14:22-33 (Job 38:4-18; Romans 10:5-17)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wish I could say I'm not like Peter. Seemingly sure and trusting one moment and then fearful and doubting the next. I wish I could say I'm always strong and steadfast in my faith, hour to hour, day to day. But I know it's not true. I am like Peter. One moment trusting, the next moment not. At once sure, and then doubting. Up and down, like a yo yo.

When challenges arise, difficulties, trials, temptations, sometimes my faith is strong and confident, knowing the Lord is working good and is greater than whatever problem I am facing. And yet at other times, my faith is weak, and I shudder and wonder how this will ever work out! And often times it is for things a lot less urgent than Peter, sinking in the water in a terrible storm. Perhaps you, too.

And so this is a great and comforting story for folks like you and me. Not because it shows us how much we're like Peter and Peter like us - but because it shows us Jesus. That not only *can* Jesus save, He *will*. That it is not the strength of our faith that makes the difference, but the strength of our Saviour that makes the difference. And that while we are often little-faiths, it is true, He is always most faithful in His promises to us.

And so it was that day on the sea. The wind was against the boat; “tormenting” the boat, it literally says, making the going difficult. But they were a long way from the land, so they *were* making progress. They were experienced fishermen, after all; they knew how to navigate these waters and were not easily frightened. So while the storm was significant, difficult, and bothersome, they were in no particular danger. In fact, what frightened them was not the storm, but when they saw Jesus; when they thought it was a ghost.

This frightened them because it was not a ghost off in the distance that they *thought* they saw; Matthew tells us that Jesus *came to* them. And that phrase - *came to* - in the Greek here means *both* the idea of moving towards and arriving. So in all probability, Jesus had probably come right up along side the boat when they cried out in fear.

And *that* is significant because it means that when Peter got out of the boat and *came to Jesus*, it was probably only a very short walk - only a few steps! He most probably didn't walk comfortably and confidently upon the water for a while, strolling to a far off Jesus - he probably took no more than a few, uncertain, unsteady steps before his fear got the best of him, he began panicking, and cried out in terror, "**Lord, save me!**" And *immediately*, Jesus does. Just as *immediately* He spoke to the disciples and calmed their fears when they cried out, thinking He was a ghost, so Jesus *immediately* grabs hold of Peter and saves him.

And Jesus says to him, "**O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**" Jesus doesn't say: *I'm so proud of you for trying; or, if you could just learn to trust a little more! . . .* Was it a rebuke? Was Jesus criticizing Peter? Or was it more like the loving question of a father or mother to their child in the middle of the night, who cries out from a nightmare? *Why are you scared? We're here; the danger is not going to hurt you.*

Yes, that's the way of it with Jesus. He is here to save. He is no ghost; no figment of some fanciful religious imagination. He is a flesh and blood Saviour who is here to save, and has, in fact, already saved you from your worst enemies; enemies which are worse than you know or can imagine: the sin that is destroying you, the death which will claim your life, and the devil who wants you for eternity. If you knew the dangers of those enemies - really! - I think you would shudder and fear more than you do; you would avoid sin more than you do; you would cry out with Peter, "**Lord, save me!**" more than you do. That we don't is no sign of our strength, but of our ignorance and delusion. Peter at least cried out . . .

And what of Peter's cry, and ours? What does Jesus think of that? **It is music to His ears!** Yes, it is exactly what He wants. For this is what Jesus has come to do - to save. When you fall into sin, Jesus *wants* you to cry out to Him: *Lord, save me! Forgive me!* When you are facing disease or death, Jesus *wants* you to cry out to Him: *Lord, save me! Raise me with you.* When you are tempted and under the assault of the devil, Jesus *wants* you to cry out to Him: *Lord, save me! Strengthen my faith.* Yes, these are not bothersome to Him; not at all.

Think of all the stories in the Scriptures where people are crying out to Jesus for help. The disciples often don't want to be bothered. They often think as we think, that these cries for help are bothersome to Jesus and He wants us to be strong and self-sufficient and stand on our own two feet. But no, it is not that way at all. Jesus rebukes the disciples for thinking that way, and then He stops and helps. Just as He reached out to a sinking Peter, so He reaches out His divine hand to the lepers, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the dead - Jesus grabs them and gives them life. It is his joy, His passion, why He came.

Yes, for there was, in fact, only one time when that prayer *wasn't* answered, when God withheld His hand and did *not* save - and that was when Jesus was on the cross. He was not rescued from sin, but had our sin laid upon Him. He was not spared death, but died our death. He was not protected from the devil, but took all that the devil could dish out, and all the curse of our sin, and all that the justice of God demanded for our sin. Jesus took it all; there was no hand to save. But then three days later, the "other hand of God," if you will, the Holy Spirit, pulled Jesus from death and the grave - not to save Him from these things, but because Jesus' sacrifice for us *conquered* all these things! He has stripped them of their power so that they can no longer haunt and taunt and torment us, His children.

And it is no ghost who did that - no ghost of Jesus come from the grave that is here for you. You have a flesh and blood Saviour, whose flesh and blood saves you from your sin; and whose divine hand will, on the last day, pull you, flesh and blood, out of the grave, to live with Him forever.

But not only on the last day - our Lord's hand is at work in your life, even now. His hand that baptized you, pulling you from your sin, giving you His life-giving Spirit, and making you His child. His hand that feeds you, giving you of little faith His very Body and Blood to join you to Him and Him to you, to forgive your sin and strengthen your faith. And His hand working through those He has gathered around you to care for you - His hand working through doctors to heal you, through parents to care for you, through friends and neighbors to support you, through farmers to feed you, through the government and military to protect you, *and how many others?* Whether you realize it or not, in all these ways it is our Lord caring for you. His hand reaching out to you and providing for you in every bodily and spiritual need.

That doesn't mean you won't have troubles - you most certainly will! Sometimes it is because you get yourself into messes, like Peter; sometimes it will be the sin in the world crashing down on you; sometimes these may even come from your loving Father, who send them to teach you and call you back to Him in repentance and faith. But it is exactly for this reason that our Lord has given you His name - that as the Second Commandment teaches us, you should not only not misuse His name, but use it! He wants you to *call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks*. For this is good and pleasing to Him.

For as St. Paul reminds us today, ***"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*** Do you realize how comforting that statement is? Whether you are Jew or Gentile, slave or free, young or old, of little faith or great faith, near or far, faithful or struggling with sin, fearful or confident - even if, like Peter, you can take only a few uncertain, unsteady steps . . . wherever you find yourself and however

you are, Jesus is faithful to all his promises. And the reason He came is the same reason He comes still today - to save. For we, like Peter, on our own, can only sink. We cannot save ourselves.

And so in Jesus, the God of Job, the Creator of all, has come to you. He is mighty, yes, setting limits for the darkness and light, for the waters and land, for the sun and the stars. But always remember: **He is mighty for you, not against you.** And if there are times, like with Job, when He seems against you, it is only so that He may be for you. To teach you to pray, to teach you to call to Him, to teach you to rely on Him, to be your Saviour. That we all may be brought to a greater faith and a greater knowledge of who Jesus is. And confess at all times and in all places - with the 12 that day - that ***truly, Jesus is the Son of God.*** Our Saviour.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.