

²²[Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee], while he dismissed the crowds.²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

In Nomine Jesu

+ + +

If you've got or ever had even a half-way decent job ... and even a half-way decent working environment ... I bet you've got or had a job description. And unless I miss my guess, it's got these or similar words somewhere ... "and perform such other tasks as from time to time may be required." For lots of us, it seems like most of what we're supposed to be doing in our workplace is covered by that sentence.

And I think that makes us feel like it really is describing what a cover letter to a job description for one of our theological seminary president positions began with: "In addition to being able to walk on water, the successful applicant should" You know, being able to walk on water would be handy not only for seminary presidents ... or pastors of congregations [please don't include it in your list of requirements for Nativity's new pastor ... even though that's really what lots of folk expect pastors to be able to do ... it's also what leads to lots of other unrealistic expectations and frustrations]. But I digress.

To be able to walk on water ... would be a handy capability for most people. I mean, haven't most of us secretly wanted to be able to miraculously surmount the problems that seek to overwhelm us by strutting gingerly off on top of those waters? "O, wouldn't it be *lovely*," the old song says. If I could only walk on water.

If we're honest with ourselves, though, for most of us the main concern isn't being able to walk on water, but simply to keep our heads above water. Lots of folk don't figure

that "making progress," or "getting ahead," or "being better off next year than you are now" is what's really important. For way too many of us, the concern is more immediate. Simple survival. "Will I make it through today? Can I survive the next hour?" That's the focus of concern.

Lots of us have major difficulty facing a single day. Maybe it's being terribly **depressed**. Maybe it's being **paralyzed by fear** of little things or great. Maybe it's feeling **trapped by anxiety**. Maybe it's **bondage to drugs or alcohol**. Maybe it's **being enslaved** ... trapped ... by a way of life that's degrading, that's brutal, that's destroying you, but can't be shaken. It starts to feel like ... and then we can't feel any other way ... that we're inside walls without windows to see anything else or doors to get somewhere else let alone having the energy ... the capacity ... to put one foot in front of the other.

Page | 2

And let's not leave that thought too quickly. It would diminish the power of those feelings. Yes, there are those who live lives that are that **hideous**; they are **trapped** by their frustrations ... unrealized dreams ... dashed hopes ... impaired health ... domestic difficulties ... job tensions ... insecure employment ... diminished and inadequate financial capacity ... family conflicts. And ... well, what's on your list ... and if you think you don't have one, check whether you're still breathing.

Because we've got to add to those personal worries the increasing crisis in our environment, energy issues, wars, and rumors of wars ... rhetoric about fire and fury and power such as the world has never seen ... guns in our streets, riots and what's being described as domestic terrorism in Charlottesville with a car crashing into a crowd resulting in death and human devastation, opioid deaths mounting it seems exponentially ... did you see the video capturing a mother and her dealer focusing on her next fix ... and her child witnessing the whole thing ... and trying to wander off. I wondered which alternative was safer for the child.

And then there's the arrogance of the quick fixers to all this devastation and challenge. One preacher said that just six simple steps will do it ... **one**, remember who you are; **two**, think on the positive; **three**, try to think of what traps you as being outside of you and not really happening to you; **four**, do what can be done; **five** develop a sense of humor, and **six**, keep a victorious image. There's a "b" word that I can't use from the pulpit, but "balderdash" is one that I can.

That preacher's however-well-meaning simple solution can't help but be a depressing message for a person who is going under in personal calamity. To one who is really trapped and has that impossible hopeless and helpless feeling, such words of advice are no help at all.

I wonder how helpful bold and blustery Peter would have found it if Jesus' words to him had been "think positive, Peter" as the water came over his ankles ... "keep a sense of

humor, Peter” as it got to his thighs ... “remember who you are” as his chest was covered ... “keep a victorious image” as it covered his face. Not much help for Peter, I say ... or for anyone sinking in life’s abyss.

And if you think that the trick in all of this ... for Jesus or for anyone ... is to know where the rocks are that you can stand on that are barely covered by the water ... well, don’t buy that navigation chart ... you’ll find it right next to the snake oil in the sales wagon of the huckster who could care less about you.

There is good news, though, in this text. It’s in how Jesus dealt with the problem. He was at prayer after feeding the five thousand – remember last week’s encounter with him? – and he realized that his disciples in a small boat encountered a storm that was distressing them. So ... he went to them in their trouble. They were frightened, their strength was exhausted trying to control their boat. The furious wind threatened to wreck them on the rocks. In that tiny boat the disciples were out of control, helplessly and hopelessly driven to potential destruction. So Jesus came to them in the midst of the storm, not with advice or six easy steps, but with his personal assistance. **“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”**

Then Peter did his ... “show me more, Jesus” routine. Didn’t last long, though. Jesus invited him not to have the fun of walking on water, but to experience Jesus’ rescue from the crashing waves. Peter cried out, **“Lord, save me!”** ³¹**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** ³²**When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.**

Here’s the manifestation that in the storms of life ... our lives ... the power of Jesus the Son of God can even defy the powers of nature if that’s what’s needed to assist his people who are in trouble.

Like Peter, let’s learn that Jesus is real ... for and in your own life. It was Jesus’ hand to him that took him to the safety of the boat. And Jesus is that same person with whom we enjoy a relationship in faith. He meets us in baptism. We know him in the Scriptures. We experience him in our times of worship and prayer. We taste and see that he is good at his table. We encounter him in the lives of others. Jesus isn’t just a figment of our imaginations ... some mysterious power to calm a storm by magic. He’s real and meets us in the concrete place of our need ... he meets us in faith.

We all know, I think, that the first requirement for anyone to get help in any difficulty in their lives from anyone who can assist them is to admit that something’s wrong. That’s what the disciples did. The storm was about to swamp them. They knew it. And Jesus came to them. He comes to us. When we know the deadliness of the stuff we face and know that we can’t do it for ourselves ... what Peter learned ... he comes to us.

And then there's this "sin" thing. Paul Tillich was a spiritual guide who taught that **"there is no substitute for words like sin and grace."** Sin? It's something that's more than an act of not conforming to rules or inappropriate behavior. No, to speak of sin is to speak of the responsibility for evil. And we aren't excused on the basis of our genes, our environment, or an over-protective mother. We've got to deal with personal responsibility for it ... our sin.

Make no mistake! Our sin is aggressive and ruthless. It hurts other people. It breaks us away from God and the rest of humanity. It creates alienation, rebellion, and a refusal to love others or to love God. Dare I ... yes I do ... suggest that sin, our basic evil, is at the eye of the storms of our lives? We're sinners, and that's at the heart of our troubles.

And then let's remember our text. If sin is at the heart of our troubles, then we're called to follow Peter and the other disciples and let God deal with our sin. And that's when we've faced the basic issue in the storms of life that confront us. We're invited to let Christ, the forgiver and savior, stop the contrary winds that threaten us. Through his forgiveness the very core of our problems has been dealt with. Yes, accepting forgiveness is the fundamental issue in our staying afloat in our stormy waters.

Oh, for sure we want so much to walk on the water with Jesus and to walk to Jesus. But are we willing to count the cost? Often we fail because our faltering faith gives way in the raging seas of life. Time after time our fickle faith causes us to fall down, to mess up, and to break our word and our promises to God and to one another. The picture story of Peter sinking in the water becomes the story of our faith.

But Peter, bless his heart, wasn't too proud to weep bitterly, to ask for forgiveness, and to reach out clutching for Jesus in the stormy waters of the Galilean sea. **"Lord, save me,"** he said. Jesus stretched out his hand and rescued him. **"O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"** Jesus asked. Then he stopped the winds and all was calm. Those in the boat bowed down reverently and confessed, **"Truly, you are the Son of God."**

May it be so for you and for me. May it be so on the bright and sunny days of our lives. May it be so when the storms of life threaten us. Jesus comes to us in his grace. He reaches us with his strength and forgiveness so that we are not overcome. He offers his companionship as our Savior in the midst of all of life's difficulties. It's his amazing grace that keeps us afloat. God comes to his people on the waters, even uninvited, to calm our storms. And that's one of the marks of his grace.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN!

+ + +