**Why do we Doubt?**

Matthew 14: 22-33

John 6: 16-21

It was June 20, 1979. My dad and I along with 2 family friends set out on Lake Erie out of Safe Harbor in Sandusky, Ohio for a walleye fishing trip. It was early in the morning. Darkness still was in the air. Dad was at the wheel of our 1977 18 ft. Tri-Hull boat which had never seen a large lake other than the Shenango Dam. The forecast was calm, with 1-3-foot waves with temperatures in the upper 80s. As we left the bay and headed for West Sister Island which was exactly 15 miles from the marina the water was smooth with little bumps along the way. The 75 HP Chrysler engine was on full throttle and there were conversations about how we had hope to catch some nice walleye that day. About 35 minutes later we arrived at our fishing location about a quarter of a mile off the East side of West Sister Island. Dad shut off the motor and the prepping of the rods and reels began. It wasn’t long after that there was a call “fish on.” Dad being the good captain that he was quickly grab the net and landed a nice walleye that one of our friends had caught. The next two hours were similar to that and the cooler was slowly being filled up.

Suddenly, the clouds started moving in and blackness was covering us. One of the friends made a comment, I think we should head for the marina. I remember dad saying, “I think it will pass.” Well, it didn’t and the wind started, and all the sudden we were holding on to anything we could. The waves went from 1-3 feet to 5- 7 feet and we were taking in water. That 18-foot tri-hull was being thrashed around like a tether ball on a rope. Dad, said “we need to get to the back side of the island. As I remember bailing water as fast as we could, dad was trying to steer the boat so we could get to the island. Thunder and lightning started and there were those fears and doubts if we would make it or not. After what seemed to be an eternality Dad finally got us to the back side of the island where the waves were much calmer but by now we were soaked and wondering how we were ever to make it back to the marina 15 miles away. I know dad wanted to reassure us that everything was going to be ok, but I could see the fear in his eyes. He had never been in this kind of situation before.

In our readings today we see the disciples in a very similar situation. Jesus had told them get in the boat and go to the other side of the lake. Last week we seen Jesus feed the 5,000 from 5 loaves of bread and two fish. You would have thought that after that they would have secured their faith and it would have strengthen to the next level. But it did not. Why? Because learning spiritual truth and growing in faith is a lesson that they will keep learning in many other areas of their life. So, no doubt this was another lesson that Jesus had for them. He wanted the disciples to learn from the stormy sea of Galilee. His message was they had to learn to trust him through the storms when they are following Jesus in obedience to his will.

Have you ever had those storms in your life? Maybe an illness, a death in the family, financial hardship, marital problems, or maybe just the stress of everyday life. I am sure that we have all encounter a storm in our life that just throws us in a frenzy. Fear and doubt set in. Our Christian faith is challenged and we begin to doubt. Friends, today, I am here to tell you that if you haven’t had that experience, you will just hang on. Jesus is going to test us whenever he can. He is going to see if we really have that strong faith and commitment of following him and doing his work. I know that I am constantly thrown into situations which my trust and faith are tested. But I do know this, that if I lay everything at his feet, he will be there and see me through. This is how the Lord helps us to grow. In this lesson today, he is teaching his disciples that one day, he will not be with them and that they are going to face many storms in their life and ministry. They were going to have to trust him even though he was not physically present for them.

Imagine that you are out in the middle of a lake and there are two rowboats and you are standing with one foot in each boat. One boat, however, is filled with holes and is sinking fast. It is obvious that unless you do something you will soon be in the lake. The boat with the holes represents ourselves with all of the leaks caused by sin. The boat without holes represents Christ. It should be obvious that with one foot in each boat we shall end up in the same place that we would have ended up in had we had both feet in the boat marked “self.” The only safe place to be is to have both feet firmly planted in the boat marked Christ.

I love when the disciples see Jesus walking toward them on the water. They were terrified and cried out in fear, “It’s a ghost.” Immediately Jesus spoke to them “take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” And then there is Peter. Good old Peter. “Lord if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water. Come he said. Notice that when Peter steps down onto the water from the boat and starts walking to Jesus, he notices the wind and at that point he begins to sink and cries out to Jesus save me! Jesus immediately reaches out to grab Peter to save him and notice what Jesus says to him. “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Do you find that strange? "Lord, if it is you, command me to risk my life, to tempt death, to walk out across 6,000 fathoms of dark, swirling, threatening sea."

Lord, if it is you, command me to stick my hand into the fire. Lord, if it is you, order me to jump off a skyscraper. That is, if it's you. Don't you find it strange that Peter was uncertain that the voice from the waves was the voice of Jesus until, unless, that voice commanded him, "Come on out, the water's fine"?

And the good news is that when Peter ventured forth, even though the going was rough, even though he almost sank and perished, Jesus reached out his hand and he caught him, just at the right moment. He helped Peter back into the boat. He stilled the wind and the waves, and Peter was saved. But if Peter had not ventured forth, had not obeyed the call to walk on the water, then Peter would never have had this great opportunity for recognition of Jesus and rescue by Jesus. My friends we are in that same situation.

I wonder if too many of us are merely splashing about in the safe shallows and therefore have too few opportunities to test and deepen our faith. The story today implies if you want to be close to Jesus, you have to venture forth out on the sea, you have to prove his promises through trusting his promises, through risk and venture. We have to be willing to take that step of faith.

A man read an ad in the newspaper, “Hunting dog for sale, $2,500.00, but well worth it.” He called the number and the man told him that he had to see the dog in action. The next morning, they met and went hunting early. The dog flushed two birds from a clump of bushes and when they fell into the water, he walked on top of the water, grabbed the birds, and walked back on top of the water. The man was amazed, and bought the dog on the spot. The next day he persuaded his brother to go hunting with him. They flushed a couple of birds and the dog again walked on top of the water, retrieved the birds, and walked back to their boat on top of the water. He asked his brother what he thought of the dog. The brother replied, "So, you bought a dog who can't swim."

Can our attitude about a particular situation really affect the way we perceive it? What can we do to improve our approach to life’s situations and challenges? There are two good reasons to put away fear. One reason may be that the problem is not nearly as bad as one had thought; perhaps you are afraid because you exaggerate the danger. The other reason is that even though the problem may be real, there is an even greater solution and help at hand.

Karl Bart the great 20th century theologian said while acknowledging the element of trust involved in faith, Barth stressed that “faith is not a blind leap into the dark. Instead, for God reveals himself in Jesus Christ, and faith is a response to this self-revelation.” Bart goes on to write, the concept of the "analogy of faith," which suggests that while there is a qualitative difference between God and humanity (the analogy of being), there is also a likeness or similarity between them that comes from faith itself.”

Is it ok to doubt? We only doubt when we have little faith and have not put all of our trust in the Lord. You are going to be face with many storms in your life. Let me suggest that you grow in your faith and trust him to be with you through all the storms of life. The disciples moved quickly from fearing the storm to worshipping Jesus. This was a logical reaction considering the power Jesus showed in walking on the water, and the love He showed in taking care of a sinking Peter.

Will Willimon says “it's a story that is told to us, a gift received through encountering the Christian narrative and the person of Jesus Christ. He highlights that faith is known by its fruits, meaning it's evidenced by the actions and transformed lives of believers. Willimon goes on to say the importance of obedience in faith, suggesting that actively following Jesus, even in the face of challenges, is essential for growing in faith.”

So, if in the dead of night, or maybe just before dawn, you should hear a voice, calling your name, a strange voice calling you to rise up, to sail forth, to risk the storm, to defy the waves, there is a good chance that voice could belong to none other than the one who is your very Lord and Savior. Who would dare to call an ordinary, not very spectacularly faithful person like you to such high adventure, to such risk and such struggle? I think you know. A-men