

10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 9th, 2020

“The Rescuing Hand of Jesus” (Matthew 14:31)
By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 14:31

**“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him,
“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

Here ends our text.

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to walk on water? People have made YouTube videos showing themselves running on water. But, of course, it’s just a trick because there is a dock 1 inch below the water that makes it look like they’re doing something that only God can do.

Peter got to experience what it was like to walk on water in the midst of a storming sea! Jesus called him to walk to Him by simply saying, “Come”. Peter trusted Jesus’ command. Would you have stepped into the sea if you were in Peter’s shoes? We might say yes from the comfort of our homes, but on a boisterous sea, well, that can swallow you up in a second, that’s another story, isn’t it?

Peter was courageous, we have to give him that and he waited for Jesus to command him to come. Peter didn’t just jump in like he was prone to do on other occasions... like when he said that he’d never forsake Jesus, or when he defended Jesus by cutting off the ear of a servant of the high priest, or when he literally jumped into the water for after Jesus resurrection and swam to the shore for a fish BBQ. Peter wasn’t a timid disciple for sure. Often, he spoke for the group of the disciples.

But, Peter was still a weak sinner, like you and me. He told Jesus, **“Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”** And yet, when a relative of the servant of whom he had cut off the ear said that he had seen him in the garden, Peter denied Jesus a 3rd time.

Peter feared for his life at that moment that the rooster crowed. Peter feared for his life when he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked at the roaring sea. And he sank...down, down, down... **“Lord, save me!”** And then, a strong hand stretched out and caught him.

Immediately! Immediately, our Gospel says! It was the Lord's rescuing hand. He never is far and comes immediately to our aid!

Matthew uses the word "immediately" three times in our reading. When the disciples were afraid because they thought they saw a ghost walking on the water, ...(of course, there is no such thing as ghosts, because at death the spirit is judged and goes to heaven or hell)...when the disciples thought they saw a ghost, Jesus **immediately spoke to them and said, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."** Jesus never leaves us wondering in doubt. His word is clear and as we heard in our epistle, **"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"**.

Jesus also used the word, **"immediately"** right at the beginning of our Gospel reading.

"Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray."

Today we focus on two thoughts from our Gospel. The rescuing hand of Jesus

- I. Helped the disciples immediately in their tests
- II. Helps us immediately in all our tests

Last week we heard the amazing story of the feeding of 5000 and how Jesus provides for our physical and spiritual needs, satisfaction guaranteed! We saw the disciples grow in their faith. Jesus tested them to trust Him that He could care for any size multitude and provide more than enough food. Jesus made them realize how impossible it was for them when He told the disciples to feed them. But, we only have a couple of fish and 5 loaves of bread. What's that among so many?

When Jesus performed the miracle and the people wanted to make Him their Bread King, Jesus withdrew from the multitude to be alone. When Jesus told them the next day that He was the Bread of Life, many left Him. And last week, we heard that Jesus asked His disciple if they too would leave and Peter, speaking for the group, said,

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68-69)

In order to make that confession, Jesus made them go through a test the night of the feeding of the 5000. Jesus made them get into a boat and cross the sea. They had to be humbled. They had to try to cross the sea on their own and reach the point of desperation

for themselves. They had to reach rock bottom, for Jesus to stretch out His hand to rescue them. That's what this boat trip was all about.

The disciples were in danger of following the popular ideas of the crowd, that Jesus had come to make this world a more livable...you know, take away any sickness, hunger, thirst and establish an earthly reign over any and all enemies. Mark 6:52 tells us clearly where the faith of the disciples was. **“For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.”** They thought they “walked on water”, but, in reality, their faith was sinking spiritually in mud.

Jesus' miracles showed that He was the Son of God and that all who would believe in Him as the Savior would receive His kingdom of grace. This is the kingdom that first and foremost He wants to give to all people. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Repentant souls are rescued by the forgiveness of sins which Jesus offers. Jesus came with His kingdom of grace to rescue all people through His death on the cross. And all who believed in Him would then reign in His kingdom of glory in heaven. But glory could only come through Jesus' cross!

Jesus needed His disciples to understand this. Their souls needed to be strengthened. Their hardened hearts needed to repent and be forgiven. Scripture doesn't tell us what Jesus was praying about when He departed from them, but we know from His high priestly prayer that Jesus prayed for the lost sheep. His disciples needed His prayer. We all need our Lord's intercession for us!

The disciples needed to be tested in order to despair of any self-reliance. They needed to sink and drown their self-righteousness in repentance. They needed to be caught by the Savior's rescuing hand. Their sins needed to be forgiven the washing of their baptisms. They needed a boat trip, a six-mile boat trip that should have been completed by 9pm.

But, this boat trip was their test of faith. Immediately, Jesus made His disciples get in the boat. They couldn't get across despite their best efforts. They rowed hard against the wind. Mark 6 says they strained with all their effort but to no avail.

But, they would not go down with the ship. For Jesus saw them and walked to them. The loving Shepherd always knows the needs of His sheep and sees them in their struggles. He cheerfully tells them that it is He who walks on the water. He made the water. He laid the foundations determined its measurements we hear God say in the Old Testament reading from Job. He walked in search of its depths. Can He not walk on His water for His purposes? His wisdom is above all! Does He not know what the disciples are facing?

Don't worry! It's Me! Yes, the disciples were afraid to the point that they let their imaginations scare them with ghosts! They were humbled, but Jesus was there for them. Peter was so strengthened by Jesus' words that he wanted to walk on water with Jesus! And then came the moment, THE moment, that is necessary and what Jesus needs to hear from every humbled sinner, "Lord, save me!" In faith, Peter realized he was lost without Jesus. In faith, he believed that his Lord would save him. And Jesus did! Immediately!

Our epistle reading from Romans 10 gives this sure promise to all people. **"if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."** Immediately!

II. Jesus helps us immediately in all our tests

What tests have you been going through in your life that has caused you to cry out to the Lord? Our all-knowing Lord knows exactly what we are facing and like the disciples, He makes us get into the boat of life and row with all our strength. The tests that we face are for our good because they show us our weaknesses, our limits. Have you faced a health crisis recently? Have you been straining with all your might to get through this Coronavirus pandemic and not get infected? When you see 50 people a day not surviving it in our local hospitals, has it filled you with fear that you could also leave this world sooner than you thought?

Have you been facing tests due to the hurricane that knocked out electricity and caused flooded and damage? Are you facing economic tests because of unemployment? Jesus knows where you are on the lake and how far you've come. Paul reminds us in Acts 14, **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."**

And again, we hear in 1 Peter 1:

"6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."

The end of our faith – our salvation! That's Jesus' goal for each of us. And the tests He gives us will make us despair of any self-righteousness and trust only in Him!

Jesus comes to you through His word and says, **"Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid."** There is never a reason to fear in the Savior rescuing hands. He will help you get

across the lake in whatever test you face. Those hands were nailed to the cross so that they could rescue you from all your sins!

In an instant, immediately, the disciples boat reached the other shore, we hear from John 6. Another miracle! Only Jesus knows how long our tests should last. As we cry out, “Lord, save me!” He hears us and will rescue you from your earthly test and strengthen your faith through it. Indeed, He has rescued us from the greatest test which we could not overcome, death itself. He died that we might live!

So, David says in Psalm 118 from the reading for today.

“I will love You, O LORD, my strength. 2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. 4 The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. 5 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears.”

Jesus is our horn of salvation! He has rescued you from the snares of eternal death. He has heard your cry in His ears. He has rescued you through your baptism and washed you of all sins. He has calmed your troubled sea. Yes! He promises to take you to the eternal shore of heaven! For He has risen from the dead. And in our last moment of this life, He will stretch out His hand and catch your soul to lift it to be with Him in heaven! He will resurrect your body! Immediately! In a blink of an eye! That’s our gracious King!

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! In our moment of despair when we were sinking in our sins, You rescued me!

So, David says later in Psalm 18:

“You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great. 36 You enlarged my path under me, So my feet did not slip.”

Your right hand held me up! So, my feet did not slip. Thank you for Your rescuing hand, dear Jesus! And we worship you. Truly You are the Son of God. Amen!

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Galatians 4:7)