

**+ Matthew 14:22-33 + Who's Holding Your Hand? + 12th Sunday after Pentecost + 31 August 2014 +**

It was getting late and it was time for everyone to head home. Their tummies were full. The disciples had gathered twelve baskets full of leftover fish and bread—enough to feed people for days. The crowds were still lingering there. “What’s Jesus going to do next?” Jesus knew it was time that he and his disciples be on their way. After all, they never did get that quiet time that had caused them to cross the lake in the first place.

As soon as the disciples brought the baskets of leftovers to Jesus, he immediately **“made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.”** With no questions asked, Jesus shooed his disciples into the boat and they pulled away from shore in the dying sunlight. No one bothered to ask, “How is the Master going to get to the other side?”, as a breeze began to blow in off the lake.

Jesus sent the leftovers home with the crowd as they scattered to their various towns and villages. When the last family finally left, it was pretty late and Jesus was exhausted. So he made his way up a low **“mountainside by himself to pray”**. He needed to recharge his batteries. So he spent most of that night with his heavenly Father in prayer.

Meanwhile the disciples had managed to travel **“a considerable distance from land”**, but there was a problem—a big wet, windy problem. You see, that breeze blowing peacefully off the lake had grown into a strong wind over the course of the night. The waves grew taller the farther they traveled buffeting their boat **“because the wind was against it”**. The disciples were alone in the middle of the lake in the middle of the night.

The wind kept getting stronger. The sea kept getting rougher, and their boat was slowing down more and more. After hours and hours of fighting the wind and waves, the disciples were exhausted. Now these men had seen Jesus calm a storm before, so you can imagine how much they wished that Jesus had joined them on the boat, but they were alone fighting against the wind.

About 3 AM, as they fought through another wave, some of them suddenly screamed out, **“It’s a ghost!!!”** Sometimes you see strange things out on the water, but even for the experienced fishermen who grew up on this lake, they had never seen anything quite like this. As they strained against the oars and the wind kicked up the waves, something that looked a human being was walking past their boat! Out there in the middle of the lake, it was like they were in the middle of a nightmare. Most of them were so terrified that words caught in their throats and all they could do was cry out in fear.

They were alone. They were exhausted, and now they were terrified, but then they heard these words from the ghostly figure, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid!”** Suddenly every one of those disciples snapped out of their sleep-deprived terror and realized who it was out there, who it was who had walked several miles out to their boat on the lake. It was Jesus!

Before any of them could respond to Jesus, Peter got up and shouted back, **“Lord, if it’s you...tell me to come to you on the water.”** Now why would Peter ask for that? Was this one of those times where Peter was so exhausted that he simply didn’t know what he was saying? I mean, it sounds like he’s setting himself up to be the next victim in a horror movie, but this wasn’t a scary movie and the “ghost” out there was Jesus, their Teacher and Lord. Plus we don’t get the impression that Jesus thought that Peter was speaking foolishly because he tells him, **“Come”**.

Keep in mind that Peter grew up on this lake. He knew better than most of the other disciples that water that’s not frozen typically doesn’t hold up under your feet. You automatically sink whether it’s a tiny puddle or a deep lake. Yet at the command of his Lord, there was Peter getting down out of the boat, placing one foot on the water and then the next, and amazingly, the water held him up! He took a step, then another and another. Amazing!

All the time he kept his eyes fixed on Jesus with the wind blowing and the waves rolling here and there. He kept walking towards Jesus, but then the wind rushed by and the waves started looking tall and frightening again. Pretty soon Peter wasn’t looking at Jesus anymore, but at the waves threatening to crash over his head. Soon his trust was melting into doubt and then fear—and just like that, he began to sink...rapidly. He had just enough time to cry out, **“Lord, save me!”** as the water rushed to drown him forever.

At that moment, a strong, firm hand grabbed a hold of Peter and pulled him up out of the water. Peter gasped as he caught his breath and realized he was alive, standing there on the water again with Jesus holding his

hand. ***“You of little faith...why did you doubt?”*** All Peter could do was hold on to Jesus as Jesus brought him back to the boat. As soon as they climbed into the boat, ***“the wind died down”***, and the disciples worshiped Jesus for who he was—***“Truly you are the Son of God”***.

As you consider this account from the eyewitness Matthew, what was the most amazing thing that happened? Was it Jesus walking on the water in the middle of a rough sea—and then letting Peter walk out there with him? Was it the dead stop of the wind when Jesus and Peter stepped back into the boat? Or was it the hand of Jesus pulling Peter out of the water?

If water’s not frozen, then someone walking on water is a pretty amazing display of power. If we were in the disciples’ sandals, we probably would’ve been terrified to see Jesus too, but when the disciples found out it was Jesus, they were confident again. In fact, Peter was so confident he went out on the water. Jesus’ walking on water was pretty amazing, but was it the most amazing thing that happened? Let’s look at our other options.

What about the wind dying down at the very moment that the sole of Jesus’ foot stepped inside the boat? That’s another amazing display of power. It was so awesome that the disciples immediately fell down and worshiped Jesus as true God. It’s another display of Jesus’ power over creation, over the wind and waves as when he had calmed that storm earlier in his ministry, but is another display of power really what’s most amazing about this account?

We do have one more option, but at first glance, it doesn’t seem like that big of a deal. It’s no different than the help that a lifeguard or parent gives to a drowning child, but take a closer look and see the most amazing grace, the most amazing undeserved love of God for a sinful human being. That’s more amazing than any of the other miracles because Peter didn’t deserve it. Oh, he had shown an impressive faith, but in a moment, that trust had melted into doubt. Peter ***“saw the wind”*** and his trust became fear. He realized how alone he was out there in the middle of the tossing waves and terrifying winds—and he thought he had nothing to hold on to. Yet in spite of his doubt and fear, there was Jesus rescuing him and the other disciples.

Do you ever find yourself being like Peter? As a believer in Christ, you have moments in life when you actually show a confident faith and trust in the Lord. You entrust your future to the Lord. You entrust your marriage, your family, your health, your financial situation to the Lord, but what happens? In a moment, that trust, that faith disappears. It melts and leaves behind doubt and fear and worry. Like Peter, you ***“see the wind”*** and think you are all alone out there in the middle of the tossing waves and terrifying winds of life.

You see all that threatens your future, your marriage, your family, your health, your financial situation, and suddenly you think you have nothing and no one to hold on to. You can’t hold your own hand. The “hands” of what you have and possess hold nothing. The “hands” of loved ones and friends who are sinful human beings just like you fail you, and you start to sink.

A wave of doubt crashes over your head from one direction. Then another wave of uncertainty crashes over you from another direction. Next thing you know, you’re starting to sink further and further into fear and doubt and worry as you despair of yourself. You cry out in fear, ***“Lord, save me!”*** as the waters of the crisis or the problem or the issue threaten to overwhelm and drown you forever. You’re about to lose any and all hope.

Yet at that moment, a nail-pierced hand reaches through all that worry and concern and fear and doubt and pulls you up for air. That almighty hand rescues you again. “No, I’m not going to let all that doubt and worry and fear separate you from my love. I’m not going to let you drown. ***You of little faith, why did you doubt?*** Why did you take your eyes off of me? Why did you forget that I’ve been with you by your side and holding your hand this entire time? Do you think I would let you go and let you drown out here in the middle of the sea of life? Look at what I’ve done for you. Do you see this hand? Do you see the nail mark in that hand? I let them put that nail in my hand when I was crucified on the cross so you would live, so you would walk with me by faith, so you would be with me and join me in the glories of heaven. Now I live, so you will live. Stop doubting and fix your eyes, your mind, your heart, your life on me!”

It’s not always the amazing display of power that makes all the difference in our lives, just as that wasn’t the case for Peter either. No, it’s that nail-pierced hand of Jesus that provides help when you are helpless, aid when you are hurting, mercy when you are broken, and grace even when you’re guilty. It is that hand of Jesus that pulls you out of the worry and the concern and the fear. This Jesus takes your hand and brings calm to your stormy life with his peace, with his forgiveness, with his sufficient grace.

As you take a look at your own life, as you see the challenges, the issues, the troubles that have caused you to strain and struggle for days or months or years leaving you exhausted mentally, physically, spiritually, who’s

holding your hand? It's not you. It's not me. It's not your spouse or your siblings or your children or any another loved one. It's not your friends. It's certainly not your stuff. It's Jesus, who is truly the Son of God. He's holding your hand. He's real and what he's done for you and still does for you is reality. There's no more need to fear or doubt or worry, because Jesus will never let you go. Amen.