

**+ Matthew 14:22-33 + Why Do You Doubt? + 10th Sunday after Pentecost +  
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 13 August 2017 +**

How do you reassure someone who needs it? Do you encourage that loved one who's having a rough time or perhaps send them a kind note? Do you hug that person who's grieving? Do you offer to pray for that struggling person and then actually pray for them? Those are all excellent ways you can reassure someone, but there's one gesture that has brought us reassurance since we were little kids.

Do you remember what it was like when your mom or dad held your hand as a child? Can you remember how that filled you with confidence, how your doubts and fears went away? As you walked across a street with dad holding your hand, you had nothing to fear. As you walked through a crowd with mom holding your hand, you knew you weren't going to get lost. That reassuring hand meant that everything was going to be okay no matter what you were facing. That reassuring hand removed all your doubts. Even as adults, holding a loved one's hand can mean so much when you're lying in a hospital bed or when you're worried about what's going on in your life.

Today we see Jesus in all his power, but we also see him in all his reassuring love. We see him reassure his disciple Peter with his hand. Now Peter had every reason to be worried and afraid as waves splashed over his head, but even then, Jesus showed his reassuring love. Often we too see the rising waters of life splash over our heads, but Jesus doesn't let us drown. In fact, as he reassures us through his Word, he gently asks us, **WHY DO YOU DOUBT?**

What an exhausting day! Jesus' disciples had just finished gathering the leftovers from his great bread-and-fish feast. That huge crowd and those twelve disciples had seen Jesus do the impossible, but it was late and time for everyone to go home. Rather than let them linger, Jesus made his disciples get in a boat and go on ahead of him, while he dismissed the crowds. By the time everyone had gone home, night had come. So Jesus made his way up a hill to spend some time with his Father in prayer. As he did so, strong winds rolled down the hills over the Sea of Galilee.

Out in the middle of the lake, the disciples came to a dead stop. Waves pounded and battered the sides of their boat tossing it all over. Now most of the disciples had grown up along the sea, but they were stuck out in the darkness. Matthew recalls how desperately they fought the wind and waves, but got nowhere as the storm raged on. Minutes became hours and the waves kept coming. They were without Jesus—all alone out in the middle of that raging lake in the middle of the night.

Exhaustion started to set in as they entered the wee hours of the next morning. Around 3 AM, nine hours after they had departed, they saw a shadowy figure on the sea doing what they had never seen before. Naturally, they were terrified. Can you imagine being that tired and that isolated and then seeing someone actually walk out to you in the middle of the night on the waves of a raging sea? No wonder the disciples cried out, **"It's a ghost!"**

Of course, it wasn't! Matthew tells us, **"Immediately Jesus spoke to them. 'Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"** Immediately Jesus assured them who he was. Immediately he made his presence known. Immediately he calmed their fears and laid aside their doubts. Immediately he made them realize they were seeing their almighty Savior. Like a father taking his terrified child's hand, Jesus calmed them with his simple words. As impressive as it was that he was walking out to them on the water, Jesus wasn't reassuring them with a grand display of power. That only terrified them. He didn't even stop the storm. No, he took their doubts away with his Word. Jesus' reassuring words remind us of how God assured Elijah in his mountain hideout. It wasn't with an earthquake or with fire or with a great wind, but with the quiet, gentle voice that assured Elijah of the Lord's presence. (1 Kings 19:11-13)

**"Have courage!"** With that one statement, Jesus filled his disciples' hearts with confidence. **"It is I."** The disciples needed to know this was actually Jesus talking to them. A child recognizes his mom or dad's voice and that unique, loving voice can make a world of difference to a frightened child. In that same way, Jesus calmed his disciples' hearts and minds. **"Don't be afraid."** Jesus took away their fear. "There's no need to be afraid. I'm here. I'm with you. I won't let you go. Everything will be okay."

Do you ever find yourself getting tossed around by the storms of life? Do you ever find wave after wave crashing against the sides of your boat? Money problems, health problems, relationship difficulties, parenting difficulties, problems at school, in the neighborhood, at work, rudeness and scorn and filth, temptations of every kind, guilt over what you've thought, said or did, worry and concern, fear of the unknown and sin in general. Do you ever get the feeling that one more wave will wipe you out?

So what do you do? Left to yourself, you'd be swamped. Your boat would capsize and you would be lost. You're unable to get yourself out of that mess because deep down you have a corrupt sinful nature that's always working against you, that wants you to get overwhelmed. Plus it pushes and prods you daily disobey God, who should just let your boat capsize, but then the Savior reassures you with his love.

With his Word, Jesus comforts you, ***"Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."*** How can he say that? We live in a scary world. There's so much that fills us with fear from dire-warning articles on the internet to fear-based advertising to real-life reasons for fear and in the world around us. How can Jesus possibly say, ***"Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid"*** to us living in a world like ours?

Jesus can say that because he has already dealt with those storms of life. He's already dealt with every one of sin's effects. He's already dealt with difficulty, scorn, temptation, and need. He's experienced sin's effects even to the point of death, but Jesus overcame every wave that sin could throw at him with a perfect life and innocent death.

So now even amidst your problems and difficulties at home, at work, and elsewhere, Jesus assures you through his Word. ***"Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Remember I am with you always* (lit. all the days), ***to the end of the age."*** (Matthew 28:20b) Jesus assures you as he takes you back to your baptism where he gathered you into his arms and made you his own. Jesus assures you as he gives you his body and blood with bread and wine in his Supper. There Jesus assures you again and again that he has given you full and free forgiveness for all your sins. ***"Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Your sins are forgiven."*** In simple ways, the Savior calms your every fear with his reassuring presence.**

...But Jesus doesn't just assure you of his presence. Like a parent pulling his child out of harm's way, Jesus rescues you from the dangers of worry and doubt. As the storm raged, Jesus calmed his disciples. So what was their first response? Relief? Joy? Peace? For Peter, his first thought was none of those things. No, filled with assurance, Peter saw Jesus and, like a little one who wants to be like his daddy, Peter wanted to be like Jesus. He wanted to walk out on that raging water too! So Peter asked Jesus if he could walk out there on the water. His request might seem a little odd (***"Lord, if it's you... command me to come to you on the water"***), especially if you're a little skeptical or have watched too many scary movies, but the Lord told Peter, ***"Come."*** Peter put one leg over the side as the boat and then the other. Next thing you know, there he was—walking on the water towards Jesus! Jesus had suspended the properties of water and allowed Peter to walk. Peter focused on Jesus, but then something took his focus away.

***"When he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"*** Peter saw the wind. He took a look at that raging, swirling, whirling, battering water and began to wonder if it could still hold him up. The wind and waves were making pretty convincing arguments, when suddenly, ***"AHHHHH!!"*** Peter started to sink! His doubt had overtaken him. ***"Lord, save me!"*** Peter cried out in desperation. He knew he could never save himself out there in the roiling water, but Jesus could.

***"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him,"*** and gently said, ***"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*** As Jesus pulled Peter out of the water and helped him walk back to the boat, Peter realized what Jesus had asked. "Why did you doubt that I could keep you safe? Why did you doubt that I could control the wind and waves?" Just to make that point clearer, as soon as they stepped into the boat, the wind suddenly stopped.

Now you could be harsh with Peter and criticize him for his lack of faith, but have you ever walked on water? I haven't! When doubt and worry threaten to overwhelm you, do you always keep your focus on Jesus? I know I don't. Isn't it easier to worry about this or that or even borrow worry than to trust that Jesus is in control of all things? Isn't it easier to focus on the strength of the winds swirling around you and doubt the almighty power of our loving God? It doesn't take much before you find yourself up to your eyeballs in worry and doubt.

What's really sad is that every one of us should sink. Our sinful natures love to make us doubt the goodness and power of God. Your sinful nature wants you to drown in your worries. It doesn't want you to stay focused on Jesus, but instead to question God's ability to care for you. It wants you to tell Jesus, "I don't believe you can help me with this problem." But once you let that doubt creep in, it grows until you doubt everything God tells you, even when he forgives your sins. Soon your doubt says, "I don't believe anything you say, Lord," and you're headed for the watery depths of eternal death.

When worry and doubt threaten to drown you for eternity, where can you go? Who can you call other than Jesus? ***"Lord, save me!"*** Like a child crying out for his mommy or daddy, you cry out to the Lord in times of trouble,

and like that parent, he comes to save you. He stretches out his almighty hand and pulls you out of those floods of doubt and worry. You can't possibly get yourself out of that mess, but Jesus can. His faithfulness, his promises, his love for you, his forgiveness don't change. In spite of your doubts, he still rescues you from danger. Again and again Jesus reassures you of his forgiveness. Again and again he strengthens you with his gifts of word and water and meal. Again and again he removes your doubts, your worries, your fears. When he rescues you, Jesus asks the same gentle question, ***"Why did you doubt?"*** When you look back, you realize that you had no reason to doubt him. Jesus had the whole situation under control. Jesus was holding you with his reassuring hand every step of the way.

My friends, why do you doubt? Jesus holds on to you through every storm of life. He rescues you from the floods of sin and death. He never let Peter go, and he won't let you go until he welcomes you with open arms into the eternal safety of heaven. What a glorious day that will be when all our doubts and fears will be gone forever through our Savior Jesus Christ! We have no need to doubt. No, we fix our eyes on Jesus. We focus on him. We trust in him, and like the disciples we say, ***"Truly Jesus is the Son of God!"*** That is who holds your hand. Amen.