

Peter Walking on the Waves

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Bible Text: Matthew 14

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After the sermon, we will sing Psalter 126, stanzas 1 and 5. The text for the sermon you can find in Matthew 14, verses 28 to 31. We will read these verses once more. Matthew 14:28 to 31,

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. 29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Beloved congregation, the disciples are in the midst of the Sea of Galilee, and the Lord himself has given them the order to go into the ship and to go to the other side. Notice that word in verse 22, "And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go to the other side." He sends them in the midst of a storm that he knew that would come. And so they are in the midst of that Sea of Galilee, and a great storm is rising and changes the quiet waters of Galilee into foaming waves and the disciples are afraid to go down in that swirling waves. But then, unexpectedly, Jesus comes to them walking on the waters. He comes to help his church. The disciples do not recognize him, and they think that he is a spirit. They cry for fear. Jesus comes to them in his seeking love, but his own think he is a phantom, but straight through their fear, he speaks the words of comfort. His voice sounds over the waves, full of love, without reproach, and he says to them, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Be not afraid." Jesus is always the first, he's always the first to seek and find his own, to comfort them in their fear. He knows them. He knows their need and he shows his power and his might by walking on the sea, but most of all, he speaks to their hearts. "It is I." He forgives. He does not reproach, although the disciples deserve that but when he comes, he comes with his peace, he comes with his grace, and his voice is full of forgiveness and love and his disciples recognize him by his voice. "It is the Master. It is our Lord."

Well, how do the disciples react and respond to the words of Jesus, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid," and, in particular, how does Peter react to the voice of Jesus? The theme for the sermon is "Peter on the Waves." We are not talking and preaching Peter to you as a congregation, but we preach Christ and his work in Peter, but the theme of the

sermon is Peter on the waves. The first point is the word he trusts; second thought, the doubt by which he sinks; and the third, the hand that saves him. So Peter on the waves: the word that he trusts, the doubt by which he sinks, and the hand that saves him.

So when Peter hears the voice of his Master, and he sees that miracle that Jesus is walking on the waves, he responds, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." Some think this is a strange request. Some commentaries think that this question of Peter is a question of unbelief. He wants to be extra assured that it is Jesus. He doesn't believe it yet. "If it be thou, if that is really the truth, confirm it to me. Assure me, because I don't believe it yet." So, some think this is a question of unbelief. Others think this is typically Peter. He was always the first, and this request is something of overconfidence, recklessness even. It's typically Peter. If he sees his Master on the waves, he thinks, "What he can do, I can."

Congregation, I think both of these thoughts or explanations are out of place. Do you really think it is a strange question of Peter when Peter asks Jesus that he allows him to come unto him? No, Peter is not looking for any sensation. Peter is not asking this out of unbelief or that he wants to be reckless. I'm convinced that this is a question of love. Love for Jesus. He longs to be with Jesus and the longing to come to Jesus in this situation was wrought by Jesus himself. His power to do miracles brought Peter to ask this question that Jesus should use his power to bring him unto him. When he hears Jesus' voice, he can't wait one moment longer. He wants to be with his Master. Now he has heard the voice of his Master, this voice has ignited again the love for Jesus in his heart and nothing can stand in the way, in between Peter and his Master. He has to be with Jesus.

And think of this situation. He's in a ship in the midst of the waves, which is, in fact, a prey of the waves, tossed in the waves, and he sees his Master on the waves. There is something of tranquility there, looking at Jesus standing on those foaming waves, and Peter is in a ship that is tossed in these waves. Where would you be? Where would you want to be in this situation? In a man-made ship that is a prey of waves? Or does your heart long to be in the arms of Christ who is standing on the waves? What do you prefer if you know Christ? If he revealed something of his might and power and grace in your life, where do you prefer to be in the midst of a storm holding onto something that you created yourself, or do you pray, "If it is thou, bid me come unto thee, my Jesus"?

Did you go unto him in a situation like this? Did you go to Christ, trusting on his word alone? It could very well be that you knew that you were addressed by the preaching of the gospel, that you heard his voice, that you could not put it aside any longer, that you could not have an attitude of wait and see. If we hear the voice of Jesus, if our souls hear the word of Jesus, the voice of Jesus, we cannot wait till tomorrow. His voice raises a longing in the heart to draw near unto him, to share in his fellowship. A sinner is quickened to go unto the Lord. We are pressed by his love to go unto him. It brooks no delay. And if you hear his voice in the night of the storm, there's only one thing left, isn't it? There, thine arrival fulfills my salvation. There's a longing to shelter with him and

every minute of delay is too long, and every distance between Jesus and my heart is too big.

Peter can't wait. The voice of his Master ignited the love to go unto him but he doesn't go without any thought. He does not go overboard all at once. He only goes when his Master allows him to come. He only goes if he receives a word to come unto Jesus. He does not take the liberty himself to go to Jesus. He would never be able to go unto Jesus. He could not walk on water. He could not walk on his own. He never could have been able to approach his Master and if he would have tried, he would drown because that would have been insolent and unholy and sinful to go on his own to Jesus. That's the lesson for today as well. Nowadays, there are people who feel no qualms to come to Jesus. They plump into the water and they think it takes just a few steps to get to Jesus. People that can always believe. People that can always go. But they are people that forget that faith is a gift of God. It's not in your pocket. You cannot just get it out of your pocket the moment you need it. Faith is a gift of God and they forget that believing is as difficult and is as impossible for us as walking on water. We cannot do that out of ourselves. We cannot do that without permission and how do they get frankness and liberty to approach Jesus? It's not in us. It's not our dignity. It's not our merit that provides us to go to Jesus. That's only because of his invitation. He calls sinners to repent. He invites them to salvation. We can only approach Jesus on his invitation. When he invites, he also grants the power to go unto him. Like Peter, we may ask for that, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee." We need that miracle to go to Christ given in his invitation. We will need that miracle that will carry us on the waves and makes a path towards Christ where there is no path for us. We need the word of his promise to carry us unto him.

"Bid me come unto thee," and by praying this, Peter confesses the power that his Master has. If Jesus will invite him, Jesus will give him the power to go. Jesus will grant him that he will reach him. And on this prayer, we read that wonderful and simple word, just one word, "Come." Come. That's an order, that's an invitation, that's a promise. Come. Peter receives the permission to come unto Jesus, and when the Lord grants him that permission, he grants him also the power to walk towards him, and relying on that word, Peter goes. Peter goes on the invitation of Christ. He steps overboard. He does that not in his own power. He does that trusting the power of that simple word, come. "When Jesus says it, I am allowed and he will make it possible."

So not in my own power but looking upon the Lord and looking upon the Savior, he puts his feet overboard and he stands on the waves. And remember, the storm is still there and the waves are still foaming. It's not a calm sea. It's in the midst of the storm that he puts his feet on a path where is no path but he believes there will be a path, because Jesus says, "Come." The wind blew even as strong as before, and the sea was as turbulent as before but nor the wind, nor the waves prevent Peter to go to Christ, relying on the promise and order to come unto Jesus.

And then the miracle. The waves carry Peter. Well, actually, that's not true. Not the waves carry Peter. The word of Jesus carries Peter. He walked in faith. It was an act of faith of Peter and Peter was convinced that his Savior was powerful to make the waves to

a smooth path. And here we see what faith does in the midst of a storm. Jesus says, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you." When we receive faith to trust his word, there is a path where is no path and you go unto Christ over the waves. You see it here with Peter. It's not an achievement of Peter, but he is protected and saved in the power of God and he may expect everything from his King, and Peter brings into practice what Paul will write later, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And so in this attitude, Peter approaches the Lord. He has to give up the safety of the ship to go to Christ and entrust himself unconditionally to the power of Christ. But his heart longs to do that, because he knows, "I'm safer in the arms of Christ than in my own man-made ship." And if he leaves the ship, he has nothing left to hold onto then only that one single word, "Come." That's faith. Having nothing left than that one promise of Christ but that promise is stronger than which wave or what storm.

In the beginning of the sermon, I said to you, pay attention to that word, "Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship." God can send his people into a storm. He can lead them into a dark path, the shadow of death. Jesus knew already what would happen that night, and when he was on a mountain apart praying, he prayed for his disciples which he sent into the storm and he did so to reveal himself to them, to show them his power and his mercy and his protection and his grace, to teach them that they can trust him in every single word he says. Sometimes he can bring us into the storm, sometimes into temptations or battles, but as many afflictions may be there in our lives he does so to teach us to look upon him and to trust his word, that word that lifts us up above all waves of sorrow and distress, and to lift us up above mountains of guilt, waves of temptation. He will create a path over which our feet will go.

Who looks upon Jesus in faith does not fear for death or hell. No storms will not yet be stilled, and the winds will not yet be over, but in Christ we find rest and peace and in Christ, his people are more than victors. Did you look upon the Lord like this? Did you go unto him by his single word, "Come"? Did you long to be in the arms of Christ and go on his promise alone, renounce all own possibilities, and expect everything only from him? Where faith functions, where faith is acting, faith does not see difficulties. Faith does not see waves. Faith does not hear storms or hindrances. Faith sees Jesus above the waves in peace and in power. Faith relies and trusts on him alone and then in faith we can stand on the waves, which otherwise would go over our head.

But that it's not something of our own and that we cannot create this ourselves is clearly shown in this history, that we as man are ready to hold and ready to sink every moment is clearly revealed. We see it with Peter. He didn't walk that long on the waves. He put his feet on the waves and was hardly approaching Christ, or he stops, and he stops looking at Jesus, and he takes more notice of the circumstances where he is in, and he sees that he has left the boat and is out of reach, and he pays attention to the wind, and he hears the storm, and he sees the waves, and he sees the result of the storm, high waves, black water beneath him, and when he sees that, he becomes afraid. By faith, and by his love for Christ, and by his zeal to come into the arms of Christ, he did not fear, and he did not see

all these things, but when he takes off his eyes from Jesus, and he's looking around to the circumstances, he loses Christ out of sight, and he pays more attention to the waves and to the wind, and he starts to fear.

He was driven by the voice of Christ but when he uses his ears to listen more to the wind and to the storm, he loses the voice of Christ. Lest he had fixed his eyes on Jesus, lest he had clinched unto the word of his Master, then it would never have come so far, but the moment he paid more attention to the circumstances, he starts to sink and the dangers are as large as life stand before him again, and the high waves frighten him in a way that he becomes terrified. He who was strong at first, he staggers and he took his eyes off Jesus and he only sees the sea and the wind and the darkness. One moment Peter is ablaze for Jesus and the other moment he's terrified.

The circumstances depress him. What a contrast, walking in faith on the water and then by doubting and looking upon the situation he is in, he sinks in the waves. And you can meet people that do not understand this of Peter. This was unbelief, and unbelief is sin, and he had to continue to trust, and he had to believe, and staggering in faith and doubt, that's unbelief, that's sin. And of course, they are right and we don't say this is a good thing of Peter, but look at Jesus. He reprimands Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But he speaks full of love. He knows his flock and the Lord knows what he can expect from them, what he can expect from his own, how weak, how little courage, how little of power they are. Let us not look down on Peter. If we do so this morning, we show little self-knowledge because even when we have received grace, we are still weak in ourselves and ready to hold, ready to fall, ready to sink. God's children not always stand on the mountaintops of faith. They're not always high above the waves of affliction and struggles. Hypocrites think they are. It doesn't bother them. They can always believe. They never suffer any weakness or doubt. But most likely, it has never stormed in their lives. They always could do it and could manage it themselves. But what if the situation really changes? But what if this so-called faith is put to the test? It will show to be work of man, not built on Jesus, not built on his word.

Faith is a gift of God and we see in Peter an example of God's church all ages, in all centuries. They never stand always at the height of faith. And when they look upon Jesus, they saw no hindrances and for that moment, they could look over it, and they walked with the Lord, but the next moment, they fall back on themselves, and they wish could I always look on Christ, then I would walk in peace. Wish they would always trust and be able to trust his word, then they would be without any fear. But in the practical life, it's often so difficult and different. That's not God's fault, that's not caused by his word, but our own weak hearts are the cause of that. Our hearts are so unstable and irresolute. Our hearts fear so often that the need and the problems are bigger than the power of our Savior and disappointments in life can follow each other so quickly, and the waves of daily things that happen can bring fear in our soul, and then the attacks of Satan and the waves of sin and guilt can rise high. In these circumstances, is there faith enough to see over these mountains and look upon Jesus who is powerful to make mountains to an even field? So often we forget his promises, isn't it? So often we look upon the wind, So often

we listen to the sound of the storm more than to the sound of his voice and nothing else we have left than fear. And Peter cries, "Lord, help me! Save me!"

So, we do not say that this is a good thing of Peter, but can't we understand it, weak as we are in ourselves? Peter was sinking and his faith was staggering, but his faith was not gone. He was not an unbeliever. Out of the depth of his soul, he cried unto the Lord, "Lord, save me," and in this cry, "Lord, save me," his faith showed again in the midst of his little faith. This cry are two stretched out arms to Christ and cry for help and assistance and salvation. This cry is a cry of faith, don't you see? Peter does not cry unto his brother, "Please, Andreas, throw a rope!" He does not cry to John, "Please, John, jump into the water and save me!" He does not cry unto the other disciples to turn the ship around, trying to get close that he can be helped on board again. No, he cries to Jesus, "Help me! Save me!" That's faith in the midst of little faith. He called upon the Lord. He realized, "I will perish. I can't save myself." But he also realizes his fellow disciples cannot save him. Only Jesus can save him. "Thou art the God of salvation. From unto Thee belong the issues of death. Lord, I am weak. Thou alone can help." And therefore, when he is sinking in the waves, his faith takes refuge in Christ again, trusting that he is powerful and willing to save him. Seeing on the waves, looking upon himself, it is a lost case, but looking upon Jesus, there is hope and he realizes, "I can only be saved by an act of grace by Christ. Lord, save me." It was a call from distress and that was a situation the Lord wanted Peter to be in, to teach him more again about his saving grace.

Peter has learned a lot in that short walk from the ship to Jesus. Many spiritual lessons he has learned that night, and he has deeply understood the truth, "For without me ye can do nothing." That's the lesson the Lord still wants to teach us, too. He wants us to lift up our burdened heart upon high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is, the Advocate at the right hand of his heavenly Father. He wants us to entrust ourselves completely to him and who does so will not be put ashamed by him. Are you frightened? Is there something of a situation in your life that makes you frightened? Know that Jesus himself came into the storm. He came into a storm even more fierce than in this portion of scripture. The ground under his feet sank away when he hung on the cross of Calvary. He cried out on the cross when the waves of God's wrath and anger because of our sin rolled towards him, over him. And then there was no saving hand. And then there was no hand that grasped him and drew him out of those waves. There was no Savior for him to save him from that death. But he went into the waves, and he went down in the waves for saving sinking Peters, that they can be rescued and be saved. He went down so that drowning sinners can be brought to safety, that those who call upon his name, "Lord, save me," can immediately be rescued.

Yes, that was a serious predicament for Peter when he sank in the water. Just picture it before you, walking from the ship to Jesus, and then all of a sudden, he pays more attention to the storm and the waves, and he starts to sink, and in sight of his Master, he is starting to drown. Did he have to perish inside of Christ? That would have happened if Christ was the same as Peter, weak, of little power and mighty to save. But Jesus is the Son of God. He is the truthful and almighty one who never forsakes the works of his hand and his hand started that work in Peter. He ignited in his heart that love to go unto him and on that question of Peter, "Bid me come unto thee," he answered that single promise

and order, "Come." Well, if he says come, he will never have his people drown who listens to his promise and act in faith on his promise.

Jesus could not let Peter perish. His right hand will bring salvation and therefore we read, "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him." Immediately. Now the cry is born from Peter's heart, "Lord save me." Jesus is quick to help. He catches his hand and he pulls him out of the waves and he puts him on the waves again. Immediately. Jesus does not waste any time. He lets Peter sink but he doesn't let him drown. He lets the water rise unto the lips, but not further. And he is never too late. He is never too late. He intervenes at the right time and he will fulfill the work that he started in Peter because Peter cannot do that by himself and if it would have been dependent on Peter, he had sunk in the depth of the water and drowned even in the sight of Christ. But Christ is truthful and Christ is strong, and he will finish the work that he starts.

And he has the sinking Peter walk again on the waves. Oh yeah, it can be that God's people think that they will perish in sight of Jesus, that they will perish with the harbor in sight, and that is an attack of Satan that is very fierce. Do you think you will enter the harbor in safety? "I will raise a storm against you." But the Lord shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. Sometimes he lets his own sink for a moment, but always he is quick to save them again and to reveal more of his grace and mercy. He does so to their comfort. He does also do that to their shame.

That's also a lesson Peter had to experience. The Lord chastens Peter after he caught him by the hand and saved him, he said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" The Lord does not punish Peter, although a punishment would have been in place, but the Lord does not deny that Peter still had faith, still had that work of his Spirit in his heart. Jesus does not address Peter as an unbeliever, but he addresses him as someone of little faith. Peter's faith was not gone, but it didn't work properly. It didn't function properly. There was still faith in Peter, but it was so small that he staggered in the sight of the strong waves and the wind. Little faith, that is, thinking little of Jesus. Little faith is thinking big of problems and powers that are against you. Little faith is thinking too less of Christ. And Jesus teaches these things to Peter. "Peter, it was not necessary that you sank. My word was strong enough to carry you all the way. Why?" So asked the Lord, "Why did you doubt? Am I not able to keep thee? Did I ever break my word and my promise when you asked me to come to me? Did my word put you to shame? Was my word not reliable? So wherefore did you doubt? Wherefore did you think little of me?"

And Jesus was allowed to ask him that, isn't it, because Jesus is the truth and Peter had seen him do much miracles and signs and had trusted his word before, and he had given to Peter his word of power, "Come," which was not only an order but also a promise. Would Jesus not be powerful enough to silence the waves? Was he not powerful enough to still the winds? "Wherefore did you stagger, Peter? Wherefore did you think so little of me, of my power, of my truthfulness, of my grace?" And I think that Peter was ashamed, was ashamed for his little faith. This is a shameful question, and it was a discovering question for Peter and still it was a lesson, this lesson, that when he enters the boat again

together with Jesus, and when they go both on board of that ship, we don't see two saviors entering the ship but we see one Savior and one saved entering the ship. And this is how it should be, one Savior and in his hand a saved sinner. The weak Peter together with his strong Savior. And at the moment they enter the ship, the wind is gone, the storm has ceased, and the waves are gone.

So Jesus does a complete work. He does not only bring Peter to the other side of the lake, but all the disciples he brings safely to the other side of the lake. And in this ship he brings them to worship his name and it becomes one confession of the name of the Lord, of a truth, "Thou art the Son of God." The anointed Savior will not forsake the works of his own hands. He leads all his own to a complete salvation. And Peter had to learn this, not only once, but all his life. "For without me, ye can do nothing." Only grace can save him. This lesson is a continuing lesson in life. Peter did not learn this in one night. It's clearly shown in the high priest's palace of Caiaphas, where he thinks he can do it on his own again. But in this way, with falling and rising, he became Peter who understood, "For without Jesus, I cannot do anything." And in this way, he learned to glorify Jesus as his one and only mighty and gracious and truthful Savior.

No, the Lord does not have big, strong children. He has dependent, weak in themselves, children who rely upon him and he grants grace to the meek, and they have to ask and to beg for that daily, and sometimes it seems for them that their way is hid before the Lord and their judgment is passed over from their God, and they can't save themselves and we cannot save ourselves with what we had once, but we can only be saved by him who was and is and will be forever the truthful God. So it will be in the end, only one truthful and glorious Savior who will not suffer your feet to be moved. Is this your Savior? Is this the Christ that you glorify as the Son of God? Is this Christ yet your part? If not, think about this situation in Matthew 14. What if the storms will rise in your life? Do you have a refuge? And if not, seek Jesus before that situation. He promises, he orders, "Come." And if this Christ is your part, then there can be times that you sink but he will not let you drown because there is always his rescuing and saving and loving hand. Amen.