

MATTHEW 14:25-33 | What's the point in doubting?

Sunday, August 31, 2014 – Pentecost 12A

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

It was foolish; all they had to do was keep their eyes focused. But every fiber of their beings fought the idea; reason told them that it was completely crazy. The Jews who had been bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness had to close their eyes, blind their reason, look at the brazen serpent on the pole, and cling to the word which God had spoken: If he who has been bitten looks at the brazen serpent, he would become well and live.¹

It was completely absurd; for decades he had prayed that the Lord would give him a son. And, against all odds, the Lord fulfilled his promise. Even in his old age, he had bore a son. It was so improbable that it was laughable, which was why they named him Isaac. But now his heart was pounding with fear and his gut was wrenching with terror: he was to kill his son and sacrifice him to the Lord. Abraham had to close his eyes, blind his reason, and cling to the word which God had spoken: All nations of the earth will be blessed through you.

It was hopeless; for centuries they were held captive by these brutish thugs. Forced into slavery, they had cried out to the Lord for help over and over again. And then a glimmer of hope appeared in a man willing to stand up for God's people. But after ten plagues and a hurried exit from Egypt, the Israelites had now found themselves at a dead end. In front of them was the expansive Red Sea; behind them the hostile chariots and horsemen of Pharaoh's army. The Israelites had to close their eyes, blind their reason, and cling to the word which God had spoken: The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.

It was almost laughable; this angel was telling her that she's pregnant! But she's a virgin...she's never slept with a man before. What would her husband say? How would she be able to face society? And, to

¹ Sermon on John 3:1-15, Martin Luther, SL 13b, 2117 f

make it even more absurd, this angel claims that this child is the Son of God. Mary had to close her eyes, blind her reason, and cling to the word which God had spoken: Nothing is impossible with God.

It was completely ludicrous; stepping out of a boat to walk on water was crazy, especially in the middle of a squall like this. They saw Jesus, but it couldn't possibly be him; it had to be a ghost. Peter, emboldened enough to speak, asks Jesus if he could come out on the water with him. He beckons, "Come!" As he unnaturally steps closer and closer, he begins to realize what he was doing—and he begins to sink, fast! Peter had to close his eyes, blind his reason, and cling to the word which God had spoken: Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.

But he didn't, did he? In fact, his eyes are exactly what got him into trouble. "Seeing the storm, he was afraid..." We can't blame him, can we? It was only natural human fear that overcame Peter. But the truth was that Peter could not be in a more certain situation than he was. The water was supporting him. He saw no obstacle in his way. But when the wind came rushing on, he saw what was lacking in him.² He realized that by his own power, he could not walk on water. That was humanly impossible. That was absurd. And so he doubted.

But then a hand shot through the darkness and grabbed him. Dragging him into the boat, two discerning eyes looked at him and asked, "What was the point in doubting? You were so close!" We don't hear Peter's answer, but we don't have to think too hard to know what it would be: there wasn't. Christ was there. With his eyes firmly focused on Jesus, what could go wrong. Jesus beckoned him to come. Jesus reassured him to take courage. Jesus was the one who would save him from certain drowning. It was Jesus who was allowing him to do the impossible.

Peter's focus was in the wrong place. While on the waves, he was focused on Jesus—and was able to walk. But soon he realized where he was, and who he was, and what he was doing—and human reason told him he couldn't do it. And he began to sink. And that's true for some of the people or groups of people this morning, isn't it. God was there. They were successful; God had fulfilled his promise to each of them. All they had to do was trust and believe it to be true. But they didn't. Instead, they looked at themselves, who they were, where they were, and what they were, and they quickly became desperate.

Isn't the same true of us? God commands us to make him and his Word a priority. Jesus commands us to, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." Do you do that? Do you rightly prioritize what is and should be most important in your life? Or, do you instead let earthly and trivial matter get in the way because you're worried about what your friends might think, or that you might lose your job, or that this is the way it just *has to be*. Close your eyes, blind your reason, and cling to the word which God has spoken: "Seek first his kingdom...and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

God commands us to give generously. In fact, God commands us: "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.' Can you do that? Is it possible for you to out-give God? Try it, God says: "'Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty..." And through the eyes of faith it's possible. Focused on Christ and his promises, you're able to do it. But we don't, do we? Instead we hoard, we keep, we worry ,and we doubt because of this bill or that expense. We have to close our eyes, blind our reason, and cling to the word which God has spoken: "'Test me in this,' says the LORD

² Sermon on John 4:47-54, M. Luther, SL 11, 1776

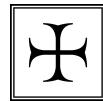
Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.' (Malachi 3:10)

We are to be unified as Christians. God commands us: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:15,16) Do you do that? Are you eager to see each other on Sundays? Do you look forward to the opportunities we have as Christians to spend time together? Do we take every opportunity to admonish one another with the word of God? I don't think you do. Is it because we don't like some people in the congregation? Is it because you're in a different social or economic class than others? Are they not "socially acceptable" for your life? Are you worried about what others might think? Close your eyes, blind your reason, and cling to the word which God has spoken: "The Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to." (Deuteronomy 15:10b)

Do you feel guilty because you haven't done these things? Each of these circumstances shift the focus of our hearts from Christ and his word to ourselves and our own lives. Right now we are each realizing that we have fallen woefully short of God's expectations of us and of our families. And we feel guilty... Right now we realize that even the so-called good things we've tried to do this week are all but disgusting rags in God's sight. And we feel guilty... We see that we haven't been generous, nor have we prioritized, nor have we appreciated the Christian family our Lord has provided. And we feel guilty... How can God ever forgive me? How can I possibly call myself a Christian? Close your eyes, blind your reason, and cling to the word which God has spoken: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Do not look at what we are and do but at what Christ is and has done, and is still doing, for us. We're not speaking about *our* nature now but about the grace of God, which is as far above us as "the heaven is high above the earth" and as far "as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:11,12).³ So now, stop doubting! You can live a sanctified life, you can give generously, you can prioritize. You can because God has. He has forgiven you of your sin. He has won heaven for you and for me. He has given us all we need for body and life.

Do you doubt that? Don't. Stop doubting and believe. Look at what he has done throughout the pages of his word: from Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to Job, to Daniel, to Peter, to Paul, to John...to you. Every promise he has made, every oath he has given, every assurance he has given has been fulfilled. So, dear Christian, what's the point in doubting? Close your eyes, blind your reason, and cling to the word which God has spoken: "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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³ Sermon on Galatians 4:1-7, M. Luther, SL 12, 240