

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

“I walk in danger all the way,” writes the hymnist. “The thought shall never leave me.” And he rightly attributes much of that danger to Satan, the roaring lion that seeks to devour us. But he goes on, “I pass through trials all the way, with sin and ills contending; In patience I must bear each day The cross of God’s own sending. ... When storms of woe my soul dismay, I pass through trials all the way.” (LSB716)

Those dangers can be very real. Some citizens experienced real danger yesterday, one killed and others injured by a rampaging terrorist using a car as a weapon. Lord, have mercy upon the injured and the grieving, and Lord, restrain such overt manifestations of evil.

Rev. Nuffer last week reminded you that Jesus is dealing with such evil and danger in this chapter of Matthew, namely, the gruesome death of John the Baptist, imprisoned first by Herod for his bold proclamation and then beheaded. Followers of Jesus especially walk in danger all the way.

Jesus sought to be alone, but the crowds did not permit it. They followed him to the desolate place, and Jesus performed many miracles culminating in the feeding of those 5,000 plus people with the 5 loaves and the 2 fish.

But He still wished to be alone to pray, and that’s where our Gospel text picks up. Jesus put His disciples in the boat and sent them ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds and went up the mountain to pray. When Jesus finishes, we see Him perform another miracle: He walked on the water.

Now in some ways, this is not such a big miracle, not that you or I can do it. But then again, we’re not the One who “*laid the foundation of the earth*” or “*determined its measurements.*” We’re not the One who “*shut in the sea with doors,*” who “*made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band,*” who “*prescribed limits for [the sea] ... and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.’*”

And indeed, that’s what the Evangelist Matthew is leading us to with His recording of Jesus’ teaching and His “*mighty works*”: an acknowledgment of who Jesus is, even as Jesus is leading the disciples to the answer of His question to them: “*And you, who do you say that I am?*” (Matt. 16:15)

Of course, this confession not an easy thing, and it can be a little bit frightening. What if I’m wrong? That’s the danger we imagine.

But I answer, go where the evidence leads you: who can teach like Jesus’ teaches? Who can do the things that Jesus did? You are not wrong. God alone can do these things. You are not wrong, therefore, when you call “*on the name of the*

*Lord,*” for “*Jesus is Lord,*” and God not only “*raised Him from the dead,*” but by the word preached to you, of Jesus’ teaching, of Jesus’ miracles, of Jesus’ sacrifice for you, of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, of the forgiveness of your sins by His blood, you come to believe it in your heart, and so you are saved. This is the good news that we hear from the mouths of pastors and teachers and each other, and this good news works in you the faith that saves, and the confidence to confess it.

But confessing this doesn’t mean that all fear goes away; for example, we still have fearsome death to pass through. And even though we know what is on the other side of death: namely gain, right? “*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Phil. 1:21)—we know that death is “but the gate of life immortal” (LSB490); eternal life with Christ is on the other side of death, a citizenship in heaven with a resurrected and glorious body like Christ’s (Phil 3:20-21)—nevertheless, death still stings, and we fear it for it is kind of unknown. We fear the unknown.

The disciples feared, too, especially the unknown. “*They were terrified,*” our Gospel says. Now, in the Gospel, they were making their way across the sea. And we shouldn’t confuse this account with a previous account where Jesus was with the disciples asleep in the boat and a storm arose. That time they were about to sink, and they cried out to Jesus, and He rebuked the wind and stilled the sea. This time, they weren’t afraid of the sea, even though the wind was strong against them. These experienced sailors were making their way across the sea; it was taking time, but they would have made it across to the other side. They weren’t afraid of perishing in the sea.

Rather, they became afraid when, in the middle of the night, they saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. What is this? Is it a ghost? A spooky specter? A fearsome phantom? The fear, no doubt, was real, but it was based on their imaginations, and their imaginations ran away with them.

That’s the way it can be, can’t it? That our imaginations make things out to be far worse than the reality. Certainly that was so in this case. This was no malevolent spirit coming toward them, but the very Son of God. And He came near with assurance. Immediately, He said, “*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*” And the disciples’ spirits seemed calmed and strengthened.

Nevertheless, some doubt remained. We hear it in Peter’s response. “*Lord, if it is you,—if it is you—command me to come to you on the water.*” It seems a rather bold request, but you can hear the doubt in his questioning.

Jesus, of course, complies and tells Peter to “*come.*” And indeed, Peter did as Jesus said. He climbed out of the boat and onto the water; and he walked on the water toward Jesus until his eyes were diverted by the wind. Then Peter began to sink in the sea, and became afraid again.

Here, I submit, the fear was not from some imagined danger. Peter's peril was real. The sea was about to swallow him up. Without Jesus' rescue, Peter would surely have perished.

Likewise, for us. Dangers are not always imagined, but often real. We have real enemies; we live in a corrupt world; we experience cross and trial; our fears are justified. Things can be as bad as or worse than we imagined or expected: the complications from a physical attack, and ongoing angst; the damage from a flood or tornado; the struggle from the loss of a job; the depression from the death of a spouse; the loneliness from a marriage gone bad. But Jesus is there for us, picking us up, just as He did for Peter, plucking him up out of the danger that roiled around him, trying to swallow him up.

Bless the Lord, He is there for you. He, who took on your flesh and became your brother, He knows your dangers; He knows your troubles; He knows your fears. Bless the Lord, He hears your cries of terror and comforts you: "*Do not be afraid.*" And trusting in Him, you are delivered from all your fears. Bless the Lord, He hears your cries for mercy and He answers your prayers. He saves you from all your troubles. In the midst of your dangers, imagined or real, look to Jesus, listen to His voice, take refuge in Him.

For He is, as the disciples confessed, the Son of God; He is the Lord; He is the Christ. And the Father sent Him to us, to the cross, for this very purpose: that He might deliver us from all our iniquities. But more than that, our Redeemer lives! "He lives to comfort me when faint; He lives to hear my soul's complaint. He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears; He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart" (LSB461).

Jesus, the Son of God, is why we can confess with the Psalmist: "*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. ... This I know, that God is for me*" (Ps. 56:3-4, 9).

For we know our God is for us in Christ Jesus. God is for us, for He sent His own Son to a cross as our deliverer. God is for us; He does not condemn us to fear or guilt or everlasting death, but promises life and salvation. God is for us still, hearing our prayers and answering them. God is for us, promising us the joys of eternal fellowship with Him, with His Son, and with the Holy Spirit.

Which is why we can confess with Paul Gerhardt in his great hymnic confession: "Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me." And again, "Now in Christ, death cannot slay me, Though it might, Day and night, Trouble and dismay me. Christ has made my death a portal From the strife Of this life To His joy immortal!" (LSB756)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.