

Matthew 14:22-33 (Pentecost 11)

### **Jesus Calms Our Fears**

Last week we heard from Pastor Punke about how our Lord Jesus uses his divine power in service of divine compassion, as he healed the sick and then miraculously fed the 5,000. Today we see further evidence of both Jesus' divine power and his divine compassion, as he walks on water, speaks words of comfort to the disciples, and reaches out to save a doubting Peter. All these things together serve to teach the disciples, and us, that

WITH JESUS THERE IS NO REASON TO FEAR

#### I.

With the world, there is much reason to fear. The consequences of sin are ever before us: sickness, death, natural and manmade disasters. Plus, the devil and the world are adamantly against us, slandering us, tempting us, and slowing our spiritual progress. In today's text, the disciples find themselves in a boat, far from land, in the darkest part of the night, struggling to make progress because they are **"beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them."** The land and Jesus are far away. It sounds like a dire situation. It may sound like our own situation.

But the disciples are not in any pressing danger. Their progress is slow because the wind and the waves are against them, but the boat is not being swamped like in Matthew 8. Jesus himself has orchestrated this scene by staying behind. When Jesus comes to them, walking on the sea, their response should be one of joy and relief. But they do not recognize him, so instead, **"They were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear."** They are afraid because the sinful flesh is more inclined to fear than to faith. Though Jesus' power and compassion should be known to them from his miracles and the feeding of the 5,000, still, surrounded by darkness and ignorant of who this is, they doubt.

Even more so with us. We know the truth about Jesus and who he is; yet we still allow fear to rule our lives, especially when something unexpected happens. Consider your own fears. Do you fear death? Sickness? Pain or suffering? Loneliness? Judgment or rejection? Loss of home or possessions? Being helpless or losing control? Do you have anxiety in general over big and small things? I know I spend a sinful amount of time and energy worrying, fearing the unknown and unexpected. Yet usually, all these fears lack substance. They are all potentialities, possibilities, things that might happen. We, like the disciples, are afraid of ghosts which we ourselves create, the “what ifs” and “could bes,” and we make an idol of uncertainty, fearing the unknown more than we trust the Lord who is known and certain.

## II.

Our fear itself, while very real, is unfounded. For the God of divine power and divine compassion is always with us and always for us. Even this miracle is for the disciples’ sake. Jesus did not send them ahead to chastise or scare them but to assure and teach them. They saw behind the scenes of the feeding of the 5,000; they saw the leftovers; the bread and fish still filled their bellies. Jesus’ divine power and purpose should be clear to them. But doubts must still linger in their hearts, for Jesus patiently prepares another sign for them—He walks on water. And in this sign, He again reveals who he is.

He is the God of divine power. Who could walk on water but God himself? He walks on the water because he was there when the waters were created, and he has dominion over them. **He shut in the sea with doors and entered into the springs of the sea and walked in the recesses of the deep** (Job 38:8, 16). He led Israel on dry land through the Red Sea and the Jordan and he gave them water in the wilderness. This Jesus is God, and he walks on water to remind his disciples, to remind us, of his divine power and identity, that he is in control and always with us.

So too, he is the God of divine compassion. The disciples cry out in fear and Jesus wastes no time in offering words of assurance and comfort. **“But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’”** This is no ghost. It is their teacher. They know who he is. If they do not recognize his voice then they should recognize his power; this can only be he who fed the 5,000. He endured the impatience of the disciples and fed them and the whole ungrateful lot. Even if Jesus comes in an awesome display, his comforting words remind us that we have nothing to fear because he is for us. And if the God who walks on water and feeds the 5,000 is for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)?

We know his divine compassion goes even farther. Not only did he feed the 5,000 and prepare this lesson for his disciples, but he took on our very flesh. He was born into this world full of fear. He took on our sickness, our sorrows, loneliness, rejection, and more. He took on the cross and died to atone for our sins, so that we might not fear eternal death. He conquered sin, death, and the devil once and for all, so that even if they do us harm and make us fear, they will not win. *Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. The world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him* (LSB 656:3).

### III.

The hymn says, “We tremble not, we fear no ill.” And it is a true confession. By God’s grace and Holy Spirit, we believers are often free from fear and can endure the fiercest trials, because we know that Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil for us. By such faith believers throughout time have endured the worst trials. Yet, we are not always so faithful. We are often more fearful, and our fear leads us to doubt who Jesus is or what he has done for us. There has never been a believer who never doubted. Even Peter, in spite of all Jesus’ works and assuring

words, still doubts and presumptuously demands more from the Lord saying, **“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”**

As if this miracle isn't enough, he demands another sign to gratify his doubting flesh. In this, Peter represents us all. Jesus gives him everything he needs: the miracle to make his identity and power clear, his sure word of comfort to bring peace to the disciples he loves. Yet Peter asks for more. And rather than rebuke him, the Lord shows yet more patience and grace to this foolish disciple and tells him, **“come,”** the same word with which he first called Peter. It's a call to faith. And Peter does trust at first; he comes to Jesus, walking on the water, just as the Son of God himself did. He comes right to Jesus' side.

Perhaps we wish the story ended here, with a triumphant and confident Peter, walking on water, standing beside Jesus. But the sinful flesh is not so easily drowned. Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and seeing the wind, he becomes afraid again. Though he must be right next to Jesus, his fear leads him to doubt, and he begins to sink.

Of course, the Son of God and eternal judge would not be unjust to let this foolish, doubting, sinner sink. He would be perfectly just to let each and every one of us sink and perish for our sins, our fears, and our doubts. It is what we deserve. **But God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him** (John 3:17). Truly we are saved through him and by him. Jesus did not hesitate to save Peter, but he **immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.** So the Father did not hesitate to send his Son to die for our sake, and the Son, Jesus our Lord, did not hesitate to reach out his arms on the cross in order to forgive us and save us.

Though you fear and though you doubt, this Jesus does not hesitate to rescue you again and again. Even this very day, some of you may leave this service with fears and doubts. And though

you waver, your savior does not. Though you be full of fear and doubt, your savior is faithful. He has revealed himself to you as the God of divine power with authority over the seas, who is always with you. In the cross, he has revealed himself to you as the God of divine compassion who is always for you. He comes to you even now in his word and, through the Holy Spirit, and gives you the very faith by which you believe. Already in this service, he himself has come to you with words of forgiveness and comfort, and he will offer yet more of himself and his comforting words in the holy supper.

Truly, with Jesus there is no reason to fear. For he promises to save us, even us, who have but the smallest mustard seed of faith. And for that we worship him. Even if every one of our fears should come true, we shall not perish eternally. *He's by our side upon the plain With His good gifts and Spirit. And Take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife, Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth* (LSB 656:4). May God preserve and strengthen our little faith and relieve all our fears, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.