

Safe in the Midst of a Storm

Job 38:4-18; Romans 10:5-17; Matthew 14:22-33

10th Sunday after Pentecost A.D. 2020

In Jesus' name. The Christian life in this world is not an easy one; not if you take seriously the Word of God and are determined to follow Christ. As Saint Paul promised Saint Timothy, quote, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3, verse 12 (NKJV) Christ Himself also taught that suffering is a regular part of the Christian life. Quote, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Matthew 10:38 (NKJV) Again quote, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16, verse 24 (NKJV) Jesus honors our suffering by calling it our cross. He uses the same word for our persecution, as He does for the instrument of our salvation, His cross. Thus He honors our suffering with this exalted title, cross, our cross. As Jesus said, quote, "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14, verse 27 (NKJV)

We are often surprised by our need to suffer. Many of us are wealthy and well fed, and if we are Christians, our sins are forgiven. So why do we need to suffer? We suffer first, because we are in a sinful world, but second because we are at war. If Christ has made us his own by Baptism and faith, then we are at war with the devil, the world and our own sinful nature, also known as the flesh. As Saint Paul writes to the Galatians, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." Galatians 5, verse 17 (ESV) Consequently we are surrounded by trials. As the 3rd vice president of our synod, Pastor Scott Murray, has written:

We live surrounded by the tempests that swirl upon us because of the trials of this life. Our voyage through life is full trouble. We cannot avoid such trouble as is found upon the seas of this life. The Lord promises not smooth sailing but divine rescue in the midst of great peril. The greater the peril, the more obvious it is that the salvation is God's. We ought not to flee from the peril, for it will redound to the glory of God when He rescues us at the right time. The Church sails on the threatening flood, expecting God's salvation in Christ. (A Year with the Church Fathers, page 252)

End of quote. This is the message of our Gospel Reading: We are safe in the midst of the storm.

Our Gospel Reading immediately follows the Feeding of the 5000 and begins with verse 22, quote, "Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds." (ESV) Matthew does not tell us why "he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side" of the lake, nor does he tell us why Jesus "dismissed the crowds," but the Gospel of John does. In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, immediately after the Feeding of the 5000, the people who had been fed, quote,

...when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." (Pause.) Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone. (John 6:14-15 NKJV)

End of quote.

The multitudes were so affected by this miracle [the Feeding of the 5000] that they were scheming to kidnap Jesus and in triumph to carry him as king to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover now close at hand... The Twelve would have delighted in such a scheme. Therefore Jesus separates them from the multitude and sends them away by themselves, in order soon to give them a new revelation of the kind of King he really is. (R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, page 568; emphasis added)

Verse 23, "And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray." (ESV) For what did Jesus pray? He probably prayed for His disciples, that they would come to understand Who He really is, and He probably prayed for the multitudes, that they would come to understand and believe His preaching and teaching, and that of His disciples.

Continuing in verse 23, "When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." (Matthew 14:23b-25 ESV) (Pause.) Verse 25 reflects the Roman custom of dividing the night, 6 PM to 6 AM, into 4 equal periods or watches. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker at Fulcrum) The 4th watch of the night is the 3 hours between 3 AM and 6 AM. That means that the disciples have been on the lake for 9 to 12 hours! Perhaps they used a sail and wind power at the beginning of the journey, but the wind had changed, and now according to the Gospel of Mark they are straining at the oars, straining to row against the wind and the waves.

Verse 26, "But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'" (Matthew 14:26-27 ESV) Our translation of verse 27 is good, but Jesus literally says to His disciples, "Have courage. I AM." He is using the name of God, "I AM." Literally He says to the disciples, "Have courage. (Slowly.) I AM. Do not be afraid," and He says to us the same thing in the midst of our storms and trials, "Have courage. I AM. Do not be afraid."

Verse 28, "And Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'" (ESV) Peter speaks out of a weak faith and asks for more evidence, which the Lord gladly gives to him. Peter is like Gideon who, when faced with fighting the Midianites and the Amalekites, asked for confirmation of his faith. The 1st night Gideon asked for the fleece to be wet and all the ground to be dry, and then on the next night Gideon asked for the fleece to be dry and for dew to be on all the ground, and it was so. Jesus also grants

Peter's request. Verse 29, "He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.'" (Matthew 14:29-30 ESV) The vast majority of Greek manuscripts inserts into verse 30 the word, strong. Verse 30, "But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out 'Lord, save me!'" What was Peter's mistake? He was looking at the wind and the waves. When he was looking at Jesus, he could walk on water, but when he looked at the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. So with us. When we look at our troubles and trials, we become fearful and begin to sink into despair, but when we look at Jesus, we have faith and can walk with Him through our trials and troubles, despite the wind and the waves.

Jesus does not leave Peter to sink below the waves. Verse 31, "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (ESV) Literally, "For what?" "For what reason did you doubt?" Jesus is asking Peter to remember everything which Jesus had said and done in front of him. Jesus is asking Peter to remember His Baptism in the Jordan River. Matthew, chapter 3, beginning with verse 16:

Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (vv. 16-17 NKJV)

End of quote. Jesus is also asking Peter to remember His preaching and teaching in Galilee, His "healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." (Matthew 4:23 NKJV) Jesus is asking Peter to remember the Sermon on the Mount, the healings of the leper, of the centurion's servant, and the healing of Peter's own mother-in-law. He is asking Peter to remember when He had previously stilled the storm, Matthew, chapter 8. Jesus is asking Peter to remember when He cast out the demons, healed and forgave the paralytic, the blind, the mute. He is asking him to remember the Feeding of the 5000. All these testify to that fact that Jesus is God, and so Jesus is saying to Peter, "For what reason did you doubt?"

The scary thing is that Jesus says the same thing to us. When we doubt Jesus in the midst of our trials and troubles, He grabs a hold of us, pulls us up and asks, "Why did you doubt?" Jesus asks us to remember our Baptism, to remember all that we have learned from the Scriptures. He asks us to remember His Body and Blood, which He has repeatedly placed in our mouth. He asks us to remember His Holy Absolution, which He has repeatedly spoken to us. Jesus is asking us to remember His word, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." (Matthew 28:20 NKJV)

Back to our Gospel Reading, verse 32, "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:32-33 ESV) What does it mean that Jesus is God? We hear that statement so often, sometimes we forget the weight of that sentence.

Our Old Testament Reading reminds us what that means. The Book of Job reminds us what it means that God is omniscient and omnipotent. Job, a godly man, certainly suffered great tragedies. The wealthiest man in half the world had all his 10 children killed in one day and was robbed of most of his temporal wealth on the same day. Shortly thereafter he was robbed of his health. He was struck "with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head," (Job 2:7 NKJV) and to make matters worse his wife and his friends were not supportive! In the Book of Job Job does a lot of complaining, and in his complaining he requests to argue his case before God Almighty. One of the amazing events of the Book of Job is that God grants his request. After all of Job's complaints, in chapters 38 through 41 God speaks to Job "out of the whirlwind." (Job 38:1 NKJV) So our Old Testament Reading is just the beginning of God's answer to Job. Job, chapter 38, beginning with verse 4:

[The LORD said to Job:]

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements--surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,
when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God
shouted for joy?

"Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the
womb,
when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its
swaddling band,
and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"

"Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
It is changed like clay under the seal,
and its features stand out like a garment.
From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

"Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this." (Job 38:4-18 ESV)

End of quote. Our Old Testament Reading reminds us that God is the Creator of the earth and its foundations. God created the oceans out of nothing and set their limits. God has commanded the sun to rise every morning, and He gives light to all the earth. He is the One Who brings forth justice. He has entered the springs in the depth of the sea, and He has walked in the deepest parts of the oceans. He knows where the souls of the dead are kept, and He watches over them. He

knows every inch of this earth. He made it and everything else.

This God, the Creator of heaven and earth, took Flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and He is the One Who walked on the water. He is the One Who went to the cross for all our doubt and for all our sin. He is the One, Who suffered in our place on the cross the torments of Hell, and died to give us life. He rose from the dead on the 3rd day to prove that God the Father has accepted His death as the payment for all our sin.

Our Epistle Reading teaches us that this salvation comes to us through the Gospel, through God's Word. Romans, chapter 10, verse 17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." The gift of God is that He has placed this Word very near you. Romans, chapter 10, beginning with verse 8:

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9 ESV)

End of quote. Jesus is both God and Human. He walked on the water in the midst of the storm and saw His disciples safely to their destination. Jesus has promised to be with us in the midst of our storms, to forgive us our sins and to see us safely to our destination of heaven. Amen.