

Matthew 14:22-33
August 7, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, today we have a very familiar story – a beloved story - Peter getting out of the boat and nearly drowning.

I'm always curious. If you were Peter, would you have gotten out of the boat?

Peter – Petros – his name means rock, or Rocky. Rocks are dense. Rocks sink.

I don't know about you, but if it were me, I'd definitely have stayed in the boat. This is something you can discuss with your family after worship. Would you have gotten out of the boat?

I've always said, I'm not afraid of the water, I'm just afraid of drowning. It wasn't until this past 4th of July that I realized that that line is from "Jaws." Chief Brody says it to Hooper when Hooper wants to go out in his boat in the middle of the night. I'm with Chief Brody! But, I grew up here in a land locked state.

Peter, on the other hand, was very familiar with the water. He was a fisherman after all. He'd spent his entire life on the water and tradition tells us that Peter wasn't a young man. He wasn't young and naive. Peter had been around for quite a while.

Was that to his benefit or to his detriment? You'd think that older people have more experience and therefore would play it safe, but it is Peter, the oldest who gets out of the boat. Maybe he thinks he has nothing to lose. Who knows?

But, the interesting thing is that Peter says, "If it is you, Lord, command me to come to you. If...

Peter, evidently, needed some hard core evidence that that was really Jesus out there. You have to remember that it was dark, just before the sun was to rise, and the waves were crashing against the boat due to the wind.

Maybe that is some foreshadowing to Easter when the disciples will see Jesus resurrected. Did they remember seeing him walking on water that day? I wonder.

Anyway. Again. I totally would have stayed in the boat! When Jesus said, "it's me, don't be afraid." I would have been relieved and happy to just stay in the boat.

Confused and amazed, but happy to be in the boat, and happier, even more so, that he was coming to join us.

You'll notice in Matthew that it says that Jesus was walking to them. He wasn't planning on passing them by as it says in Mark. Jesus was on his way to join them where they were.

This is a good reminder that God always comes to us. Jesus is born to us. Jesus is resurrected to us. Jesus will return to us. And, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus has come to be with us for all of eternity.

God comes to us, even in the midst of great storms, or especially in the midst of a great storm.

Jesus is our calm in the midst of chaos. That's great news right now, isn't it? If we've ever needed Jesus to come to us, this is the year! And God does come to us, bringing us peace. God comes to us. We don't have to go to God, and Peter makes that pretty clear.

Peter was already safe inside of the boat and Jesus was coming to him. So, why did he need to go be with Jesus outside of the boat? Why didn't he just say, "Hey! Jesus! It's awfully windy and wet out there, come join us in the boat!"

But, not Peter. Peter needs proof. The Rock. Mr. Dense needs proof. On the water. In the middle of a horrible storm.

"If it is you, then command me to come to you." Peter is so demanding! I think there would have been a better way for Jesus to prove it was him, right? "How many people did we just feed on the beach?" "5,000 plus" "Hey everyone! It is Jesus! Move over."

Maybe he was just showing off for the rest of them. Look how brave I am. You all don't need to be afraid. That is, until he realizes what in the world he has asked and then starts to freak out when he gets out there.

How often do we freak out when our prayers have been answered?

But, Jesus isn't harsh with Peter after he sinks and Jesus rescues him. Jesus isn't upset that he had to pull Peter out of the water. It's not, "You of little faith!!! Why didn't you trust me!!! Ack!"

No. It was more like how you would talk to a small child who is afraid. Someone compared it to a child learning how to ride a bike, got frightened, and then fell down. “Oh. It’s ok. You’re fine. I’m with you. I won’t let you get hurt.”

Here again Jesus is coming to us and giving us peace. Peter might have felt ashamed at his failure, but Jesus brings him comfort. Remember Jesus just had compassion on the massive crowd of hungry people. Of course he is going to have compassion on his close friends.

Jesus is God’s love personified. Jesus is compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. I think the picture on the cover of the bulletin shows that pretty well. Jesus reaching down for us, coming to us.

I picked that picture, because it hit a chord with me. This Bible story is really well known and loved, and I was wondering if there was anything new to discover in it. As I was looking for a picture, I came across this one of Jesus’ hand reaching down to Peter’s outstretched hand from underneath the waves.

I’m a visual person. Pictures help me to see things more clearly. And when I saw that one, it made me think about birth, about being born.

In Italian, when you are born it is said that you are being exposed to the light. In this saving act, Peter is most certainly being exposed to the light of the world, just as the sun was coming up over the horizon.

Water is often used in depictions of birth. As you know, before we were born, we were floating in the water of our mother’s womb. When the placenta breaks and the water comes rushing forth, we are then born into the world.

We use water in Holy Baptism as a symbol of being reborn in Christ. And throughout the Bible, passing through water signifies new life.

So, when I saw that picture on Wednesday, I thought about birth, and it made me think that this story is a foreshadowing of things to come – death and resurrection.

And it also made me think about things that had already been – God creating order out of chaotic waters in the beginning, Noah floating on the waters of the flood, the Israelites crossing the Reed Sea, Joshua then bringing them into the Holy Land by crossing the Jordan River, Elijah and Elisha crossing the River Jordan as the mantle was passed from Elijah to Elisha, yes that Elijah from the first reading, Jesus baptized also in the River Jordan as he took on his ministry with full gusto, and us being baptized with water for our new birth, our new life in Christ

Water and new life go hand in hand, and sometimes the water is actually quite chaotic!

In the midst of drowning, Peter at least knew enough to call out to Jesus for help. We know Peter is a good swimmer from other accounts, but in this situation he doesn't try to save himself. He calls on the Lord. I think that's really quite significant as we spend these days pondering our own baptisms.

Peter called on the name of the Lord in the midst of his fear. That's what a little faith looks like and a little faith is all it takes.

If you even remotely trust in the Lord, you will call on him, and he will save you.

In baptism, we are assured the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to call on the name of the Lord.

As it says in the Small Catechism concerning the 3rd article of the Creed – I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospels, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith.

Perhaps Luther should have also added how the Holy Spirit does that. The Holy Spirit does that through other people.

God comes to us, and enables us to call on God's name. But, it doesn't end there. We are then sent to share God's love with others so that they too may call on the name of the Lord.

As Paul says, "How are they to call on the one in whom they have not believed. And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?"

In baptism, we are the ones sent. We are the body of Christ here and now. We go on God's behalf to others, because God comes to us, we do not go to God. Jesus comes and then we go.

So, Peter actually had it all quite backwards. Jesus does not command us to come to him, but to go out to everyone else, remembering that he came for everyone and he is with us always to the end of the age, loving us and showing us compassion.

Thanks be to God. Amen.