

## Sermon for August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### Ninth Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 14:22-33

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

**Fear** is a formidable power. Just look at all that is going on in the world around us today. Wars, gang violence, bombings, crime, greed, terrorism, the destruction of our world, neighbor against neighbor, and the list goes on. Fear is a powerful, irrational, motivator and the hidden slave-driver that often **controls us** and **robs us** of our God-given freedom. Fear's agenda has **nothing to do** with the hope, the love, the peace, the faith, the forgiveness, and all those things which we Christians know as the ways of God. Dealing with **fear and anxiety** can tear apart our faithful living.

*How did we get to this place of great fear anyway?* This is **not** how God intended us to live. In our willingness to **serve fear's agenda** much of the beauty that God intended for our lives is **eroded**. And our willingness to **ignore** love's place in our hearts and minds may evolve us into being much less than we were created to be.

There is a **hymn** in our hymnal #755. It is called, '*Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me*'. I believe the words fit in well with our **gospel** reading for today; if you look at it—pause to let them check it out—it was written in the **mid-1800's**. Obviously

fearful times were just as prevalent then as today with anxiety ridden words such as: tempestuous sea, unknown waves, treacherous shoal, ocean wild, and fearful breakers. But you may **also** notice, at the end of the hymn, God's grace and mercy wins out when Jesus says, "*Fear not, I will pilot thee.*" Are those **not** the words that we are longing to hear when we are gripped by fear and anxiety? "*Fear not, I will pilot thee.*" God is with us no matter what.

I would like to tell a **quick** story about Ardyce and the last time I saw her—a week ago tonight. She and I were talking about what was going on with her and how she felt about it. She said, "*You know pastor, I am at peace with it. I cannot control it, I am not afraid, I know God is with me, I am ok.*" I sensed a calmness and a faith in her voice that she **knew God** was going to make everything alright in the end. She had given her life into His hands, into His will, and into His grace and mercy. Fear of the unknown was not a part of the picture for her.

In our **gospel** reading for today it says that immediately after the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus **made** his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him so that he could be alone to pray. When Jesus was finished the boat was **far** from the land, the **wind** was against it, and it had been **battered//tormented** by the waves. It must have been a very scary time for the disciples to be out there on the sea all by themselves. **Early** in the morning, before daybreak, while it was **still dark**, Jesus came walking to them on the lake. What a sight **that** must have been. The

disciples were **terrified** at what they were seeing—not that they were not already scared enough because of the waves—but here comes this figure **walking** toward them. They cried out in fear!! “*It is a ghost!*” Jesus replied, “*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.*” Do not be afraid—where have we heard those words of comfort before? PAUSE//// We have heard them said to Abraham, Moses, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds tending their flocks, and to the women who were looking for Jesus’ body Easter morning. We heard them said when Paul sitting in a jail cell, and to the disciples in the boat which was being battered and tormented by the waves.

In our reading, **impetuous Peter** wanted proof. He needed concrete verification that Jesus was who he said he was. Ok, Peter—if you want proof—**come to me. Test your faith.** We see that first Peter set his eyes on Jesus, he is focused, in **faith** he stepped out of the boat and began to walk on the water, then—here pay attention to this—it was when he became frightened, when he took his focus off Jesus that was when he began to sink. He cried out for Jesus’ help, ‘*Lord, save me*’. The **response** was, “*You of little faith, why did you doubt?*” Isn’t that what fear does to us all? It takes our eyes off Jesus, it takes our focus off God. Relying on our own power and strength we also cry out, “Lord, save me!”

We heard similar words of faith said in a bit **different** way in our **second** reading for today also, the apostle Paul wrote, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” It takes **faith** to really know and understand just what

those words mean. There is a mystery to life and to faith that tells us that there will be fearful times, times when we are tossed and turned by the storms of life, times when we, like Peter, cry out for help saying, “*Lord, save me!*”

This is a **powerful story** of human nature. It **reveals** something deeply true about humanity. We **call out** to God in our most **desperate** times when our ongoing need for God becomes **painfully clear** as God not only responds to our needs, but actually **desires** that we seek to live lives of courage. If Peter would have never stepped out of that boat **what** would he have learned about the saving power of God? **What** would he have learned about focus and not taking his eyes off of Jesus? **What** would he have learned about his own humanity?

Also, in this story of human nature we are reminded of the disciple’s revelation, “*Truly you are the Son of God.*” **Think** about this, if Jesus had **not forced** the disciples to embark upon the journey, if Peter had never ventured out of the boat, if he had not obeyed the call to walk on the water, then the disciples would have **never had this great opportunity** to see God revealed in their midst and to recognize Jesus for who He truly is. There is so much to be learned in this story about **human nature and how we relate** to God.

So, sometimes we **just** need to step outside of the boat in faith, **trusting** that God is with us and for us. Living with courage and hope, taking chances,

risking ourselves in relationships with others, overcoming our fears, remembering that God is **always there** responding to your deepest needs.

Sometimes when we face our own fears we may feel that Jesus is calling us to cross what feels like **very rough waters** where we are **constantly** being thrown about. But knowing God is there for us, calling forth courage even in the face of adversity, our rising fears will **not** get the best of us. Remember, also, the **comforting words** of Jesus to Peter at a time of great fear and trembling, *“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”* **AMEN.**