

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Matthew 14:22-33
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 August 10, 2014

CHILDREN'S SERMON – Spark Story Bible

ADULT SERMON

This past Wednesday, 5:30 a.m., I sat in my chair, legs stretched out on my footstool. My Bible and sermon notes were propped in my lap. Ahead of me, at the tree line across the lake, I spotted a bright red ball. A second look and I realized it was the rising sun. Fires way up by Hudson Bay are hazing over our skies and turning the morning sun to blood red. And at the same time, our entire world is hazed over by wars, deadly disease, kidnapped little girls, drug trafficking... turning the morning sun to blood red...

The sun was often clouded over in Jesus' day too. John the Baptist had been beheaded. Jesus had finished feeding the crowd of 5,000 plus. It was nearly dark, Jesus sent the crowds home and he "**made**" the disciples get into the boat and head back out across the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were on a great adventure with Jesus - only now they were heading off into the dark and stormy night without him. **Life often presents us with challenges.** While the disciples set off against a headwind, Jesus was finally able to go up the mountain for some quiet time to pray. Jesus is the Son of God, Savior of the world and yet, amidst all the demands of the world, he carves out prayer time. **Do you do that?**

When Jesus' alone-time with God was finished, the disciples were far from shore, battered by the waves and the wind was against them. Now some of the disciples were experienced fishermen and would have been accustomed to rough going on the Sea of Galilee. But they were no doubt dead tired between 3:00 & 6:00 a.m. when our story takes place. For the Israelites, the sea represented destructive powers on a cosmic, political or personal level. For most, the sea was a worrisome place. So they are in a bad spot and all of a sudden ghostly-appearing Jesus comes walking across the water... and they were "**terrified.**" "**It is a ghost!**" **Do you know anything about fearful times?** Then came Jesus' answer. "**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**" "**It is I**" is just a different way of saying

“I am who I am.” This is the most holy name of God first given to Moses back in Sinai. Jesus said, **“I am God coming to be with you. You don’t have to be afraid.”**

Good old Peter fires back to Jesus, **“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”** Peter is always first to respond, first to act. He was trying very hard to be a faithful follower of Jesus. **Have you been trying to be a faithful follower of Jesus? Have you ever asked Jesus to help you to do something that was pretty scary?**

Jesus said to Peter, **“Come.”** Peter stepped out of the boat and started walking toward Jesus. But, when Peter noticed the strong wind whipping against him, he took his eyes off of Jesus, got scared and started to sink. He cried out, **“Lord, save me!”** My foot wouldn’t even have touched the water. I would have stayed glued to the inside of the boat. **“Lord, save me!”** Here’s what our text says next, **“Jesus reached out his hand and caught him...”** And Jesus simply said, **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

Maybe I am in good company with those fearful disciples. Jesus came to them in a way that they didn’t expect and it terrified them. **Sometimes the presence of God in our lives might be frightening...** Maybe you and I are in good company with Peter. We are trying to follow Jesus or we probably **wouldn’t be here today.** We probably **wouldn’t give money** to support the mission of this church. We probably **wouldn’t pray...** Maybe we are in good company with those disciples who found themselves fighting strong winds and tumultuous seas. Do you not some days feel like **everything is working against you?** Maybe you and I know something about trying to live a life of trusting God **but sometimes slipping beneath the waves of doubt.**

Our anniversary trip to Hawaii involved a 2 ½ hour flight from Minneapolis to Arizona and then a 5 ½ hour flight over to Hawaii. Reverse that on the way back. We’ve flown enough that Jennifer came prepared with some anti-anxiety pills to feed to her husband. Did I ever mention that I have a few phobias? I’m not so good with high places. You may recall that story. I’m also not too good with tight places. The pills worked fine on the way over. On the way back, I took my little pills just before leaving Hawaii. The flight went just fine into Phoenix. A little layover there and soon we would be on the flight home to winter. I mean to Minnesota. Problem.

Jennifer had also arranged for me to have an aisle seat on every one of our six flights during the trip. Not on this last leg however. An elderly lady was sitting in the aisle seat when we got on board. I asked her politely, **“Do you have a preference for the aisle seat?”** She shot a wicked glare at me and said, **“I certainly do. I paid \$65 extra for this seat!”** **“Oh,”** I replied, **“that’s fine. I just thought I’d ask.”** Into the center seat I went. No problem.

After a long wait, we found that our plane had a problem. The captain was hopeful that it could be fixed shortly. An hour later, he announced that the repair would take much longer. A part had to be flown in. Then he told us to unload and wait in the terminal while he tried to secure another plane. **“Stay close to the gate.”** I went off to find a restroom. I got back just in time to board the second plane, a little stressful. Quite a bit of time had passed again. While we waited Jennifer quietly told me that she had heard the older lady bad-mouthing me in the terminal for trying to take her seat. I quietly apologized to the lady for distressing her and said that I would be fine. We took off.

Everything was going to be just fine. The air conditioning that I usually have blowing on my face wasn’t working. I wasn’t feeling too good. I need to move my feet. I took my shoes off. I tried to think pleasant thoughts. I tried to read. I poked Jennifer and told her that she needed to talk to me. She started asking me questions. **“No,”** I said. **“Don’t ask me questions. I just need you to talk and distract me. I’m getting a claustrophobia attack.”** **“I’ll reach down in my bag and get you another pill.”** When she bent over, it totally filled up the remaining room by my feet and legs. She couldn’t find the pill. Things were going downhill. I don’t know if it’s like walking on water, but I like Peter, was having a **“no faith”** in Jesus moment. It’s a good thing that they have bathrooms on airplanes...

Remember me sitting in my chair and watching that blood red sun coming up the other morning. Remember how I was working on my sermon. I believe that I have written and preached something over 2,000 sermons in my lifetime. Almost every week it is the same for me. Stomach tied up in knots, **“Lord, what am I going to say to your people?”** **“Will I be able to get a sermon done this week?”** When I go to work each morning, it is, **“What will I say to the person who just lost a beloved family member? What will I do for the person who is in jail? How can I help the one who is battling chemical dependency? How can I counsel the person**

who has given up on God, when I sometimes have doubts of my own?” Sometimes my faith in Jesus is not very good... **“Lord, save us!”**

When Jennifer and I were first married, there were times when we battled and I wondered if I’d still have a wife. During my senior year in seminary, after four years of college and three years of seminary, I was sick of school and thought about giving up. Jennifer convinced me to stay. After all, she had helped to pay for four years of my schooling. It took us eight years to finish paying off the bills for our first child Leah following her bout with seizures. As we interviewed for our first parish, they told us what I would be paid and I said to Jennifer, **“What are we going to do with all this money?”** When seminary bills and doctors’ bills rolled in, we had no problem spending it. Sometimes the church didn’t have the money to pay us. Sometimes the owner of the little grocery store in Outing would write down what we owed him on a little slip so that we could pay later. **“Lord, save us!”**

When we went to start the new church in Baxter, my selfish prayer was, **“Lord, please let 50 people come today.”** There was no certainty that enough people would want to help start a congregation there. **“Lord, save us!”** When I took the call to Aitkin, I wondered, **“Will these folks be able to heal from the turmoil and heartache that they have been through? Will there eventually be another pastor who can come and partner with me in caring for this parish? Will our offerings be sufficient for Pastor Melissa to stay?”** And will I get a sermon done this week? **“Lord, save us!”**

Peter wasn’t perfect. His faith wasn’t so good. I’m not perfect. My wife is not perfect. Our faith is not always so good. You are not perfect. I suspect your faith is not always so good. Peter went down. I got claustrophobia. And what did God do? **“Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.”** There is our gospel word for today and forever. **“Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.”**

Are you in the boat? Is the sun overcast? How bad is the storm? Do you have one foot tentatively hanging out over the edge as you think about following Jesus? Jesus says, **“Come.”** Go for it! Walk with Jesus through all the storms of life. Walk with Jesus in the green pastures. Walk with Jesus when you don’t know which way to turn. And if you fall, Jesus may well say, **“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”** And then he may say,

“You of little faith, why did you doubt?” But you can bet, either way, Jesus will **“immediately reach out his hand and catch you.”**

“Lord, save us.” Little faith, big faith, no faith - **Promise** – Jesus will **“reach out his hand and catch you!”** **That’s our God!** Thanks be to God. Amen.