

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – August 31, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23) After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24) but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25) During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. **26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** 28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29) "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32) And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33) **Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

Fellow believers in our Lord;

“Hold my hand daddy” – our young children may have brought that request to us when they felt unsure of themselves or insecure. On other occasions it may be the parents who sense a need to keep their children safe and so they say – hang on to my hand and do not let go!

In the account of the miracle of the stilling of the storm Jesus took hold of Peter’s hand and lifted him up to safety. This miracle not only shows us that Jesus is true God who has power over the forces of nature it also reminds us that Jesus cares for us with his love and almighty power.

We can express this truth by saying that

Theme: Jesus Won’t Let Go of Your Hand

1. He lifts you up in prayer
2. He saves you from harm

In our sermon last Sunday we considered Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of the 5000. Following that miracle John tells us that people wanted to force Jesus to become their king so that he could take care of their needs. But Jesus would have nothing of this – he would not be tempted to set aside his divine mission of offering his life as a payment for the sins of the world. And so Jesus withdrew to a private place. But before he did that he sent his disciples away as our text for today tells us. **Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.**

Jesus was aware of the crowds desire to force him to be their king. He also understood that his disciples might be tempted to join the crowd in their efforts – they too often expressed the misguided thought that the promised Messiah would be a worldly and political king and leader. That explains why Jesus made his disciples get into the boat. It was for their own good.

After Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and after he dismissed the crowd **he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.**

The Gospel accounts report that Jesus went off to pray by himself on numerous occasions. As true man he had a need to bring his needs and concerns to his heavenly Father. From the account of Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed we know that Jesus often sought strength and encouragement from his heavenly Father in the face of temptation. Jesus had just turned away the temptation of the crowd to become their king. This was a perfect time for him to turn to his Father in prayer.

From the accounts of Jesus' prayers on the night he was betrayed we also know that Jesus expressed concern for his disciples. This was also a time for Jesus to pray for his disciples – asking that they would come to see him not as an earthly king but a heavenly king – one who could deliver them from sin and eternal death.

And when we consider the compassion that Jesus felt for the crowds of people whom he had fed with his word and with the miracle of the loaves and fish, it's natural that Jesus would also have included this crowd on his prayer list asking that his message would take root in their hearts.

You and I face many of the same temptations that confronted Jesus' disciples and the crowd whom he fed. That is why we need Jesus to take us by the hand and to hold on to us. And that is why Jesus lifts us up in prayer. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus lifts us up in prayer in Romans 8:34 where we read that **Jesus is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us...**

Jesus died for our sins paying the penalty that we owed because of our failures to resist temptation. Our debt has been canceled. God the Father has accepted the payment for sin that Jesus made on our behalf. Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day after his death on the cross is proof. And now Jesus – the one who paid for our sins is seated in glory in heaven and prays for us – pleading our case, seeking the Father's blessings for us.

By lifting us up in Prayer Jesus is providing us with safety and security. Jesus won't let go of your hand.

2. He saves you from harm

While Jesus was alone on the mountainside praying a sudden storm had come up. Such sudden storms often come up on the Sea of Galilee due to its location. This lake is surrounded by the tall hills of Mount Herman. When the cool winds come rushing down those hillsides and collide with the warm air rising off the lake the result is violent winds. From the account we have in our text it would appear that this storm was even more violent in nature than many. Matthew who was one of the twelve in that boat reports: **the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.**

After Jesus had spent a considerable time in prayer and after the disciples had spent a considerable time struggling against the winds Jesus went into action to save his disciples from harm. **During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."**

It was dark and stormy, the disciples were exhausted from the days activities coupled with their frantic efforts to row the boat on the stormy lake. Their fear of drowning in the storm added to their fragile mental state. In this fragile state they gave in to their superstitious inclinations thinking that Jesus was a ghost – when they saw him walking on the water. They were terrified and cried out in fear.

How often aren't we overcome by fear in our lives? Children might be afraid of the dark. Storms and winds might fill them with fear. Adults have their own fears too – we may be afraid that we may not be strong enough

to protect our loved ones. Jesus will never let go of our hand – no matter how old we are. He saves us from harm.

When Jesus' disciples were filled with fear he said to them: Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Just as the comforting voice of a parent offers reassurance to a frightened child so the voice of Jesus offered comfort to the disciples. They weren't seeing a ghost – this was Jesus. They recognized his voice and his words encouraged them to set aside their fears. It is I he said.

His words had the desired affect. Peter heard the words and believed. He shows his confidence that this is Jesus when he says: **"Lord, if it's you ... tell me to come to you on the water."** 29) **"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.**

At Jesus' invitation Peter actually walked on the water toward Jesus. Jesus enabled him to walk toward him. The Lord Jesus hasn't promised us that we will be able to walk on water but he does invite us to follow in his footsteps in life. And as we do that it is important for us to know that he has the power to keep us safe wherever he asks us to go. It is certain that without him we can do nothing but with him all things are possible.

Sadly however we at times let our own fears get in the way of Jesus' power. In weakness of faith we fail to trust in him. Peter was the same way. Jesus word's emboldened him to ask permission to walk on the waves to Jesus but it didn't take long before he set his faith in Jesus aside. **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"** When Peter began to sink – he once more was confronted with his own weakness and once more he cries out in faith – his words are a short but simple prayer: Lord save me!

And his Savior did not disappoint him. **Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"**

Peter's doubt, like our doubts, really doesn't make a lot of sense do they? But yet how often haven't we let doubt and worry fill our lives before we turned to the Lord for his help in prayer. Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter – restoring his faith.

We have a God who is a warm and tender God, a God who holds us in his hands and will never let go. Consider the promise God makes in Isaiah 41:13 and take heart. (Isaiah 41:13 NIV) **I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.**

Or consider the tender words of Jesus who speaks of us as sheep whom he holds in his hand. (John 10:27-30 NIV) **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28) I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."**

Safe in the hand of Jesus – what a comforting thought that is for God's children of all ages. It is that thought that comforts us in the many trials of life and in the face of death. Safe with Jesus – that's how our text ends for today. **And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33) Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."**

The Lord Jesus provided safety for the twelve in the boat on the stormy sea. As he and Peter stepped into that boat the wind died down. John's Gospel reports that they were immediately on the other shore. Jesus had rescued them from harm and they worshipped him for this saying, **"Truly, you are the Son of God."**

Jesus is the Son of God – our Savior the one who will never let go of our hand, the one who lifts us up in prayer, the one who rescues us from harm and promises to go with us until he calls us to be with him in heaven forever. Therefore let us take courage and worship him. Amen.