

“STEPPING OUT IN FAITH”

(Matthew 14:22-33)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

“**A drowning man will clutch at straws**” is a well-known expression! It simply states the fact that a drowning person will, in a panic, lash out and grab whatever is nearby. This is the danger that the live-saver has to contend with, and has to calm the person down, before rescue can be achieved.

To “**clutch at straws**” is a human frailty that afflicts all people, even Christians, who should know better. And when difficult times, times of testing, times of storms lashing around us, like the current COVID pandemic, there is a tendency to wildly thrash around, clutching at all kinds of straws, and in the process there is the danger of brushing aside the One who comes to save.

That’s the Message of today’s Gospel account of Jesus walking on water!

Our problem, though, is that we don’t see the relevance of this miracle, in any practical way, to the real-life storms threatening to overwhelm us!

We tend to focus our attention on Jesus walking on water, as a nice miracle story, and fail to see the message that is there, and in effect ignoring it! We can end up being like a:

Boy’s first time in Sunday School. The Lesson was about: **DAVID AND GOLIATH.**

Parents ask: “what did you learn in **SS?**” The boy replies: “**How to kill giants!**”

David expressed the message behind this incident:

“The LORD who delivered me from the lion and the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

So, what is this walking on water miracle all about, and what has it got to do with us today?

When we turn our attention away from the **action** of the miracle and **back to Jesus**, then we have a better chance of seeing what God is up to in this episode!

After the feeding of the 5,000+ Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side while he dismissed the crowd and went to pray. That evening the wind picked up and the waves buffeted the boat, which kind of scared the disciples, and then to top it off they see Jesus walking on the lake terrifying them! What with the gale and now a ghost!

Where the account starts to get really interesting is when Jesus identifies himself to the disciples to calm their fears:

“Take courage! IT IS I. Don’t be afraid.”

The phrase that’s used here is more than a simple greeting. Jesus uses a phrase that means far more than ***“Calm down fellows, It’s just me!”***

The phrase ***“IT IS I”*** in the Greek is ***“Ego Eimi”*** which literally translated is ***“I AM”***. This is the same identifying phrase that God uses in the Greek translation of the OT, when Moses is at the BURNING BUSH, [Exodus 3:14], and is told by God to go back to Egypt and lead the people out. He asks for God’s name, and gets this answer: ***“I AM WHO I AM. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”***

“I AM” is God’s name!

And here Jesus uses this to refer to himself. In the account of the birth of Jesus [Matthew 1:23] when the angel announced to Mary that she would bear a Child, he quotes Isaiah 7:14:

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” –which means, “God with us.”

Jesus is ***“I AM”*** - ***God with us!***

There are several ***“I AM”*** passages in Gospels, like this one:

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I AM! At this, they picked up stones to stone him, . .

”John 8:58,59

They wanted to stone him, not because of his bad grammar, but because of blasphemy, referring to himself as ***“I AM”***.

At his trial [Mark 14:62] when asked by the high priest if he was “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One,” Jesus answered ***“I AM”***. He was condemned to death for blasphemy!

As you look at Peter’s actions as well as his words, and his unusual request, It’s obvious that Jesus’ self-identification is exactly what sets Peter off on his wild water adventure. Peter is basically asking something like this:

“If you really are “I AM” here with us, then give me a command to come.”

When Peter steps out of the boat, the truth is revealed that this Jesus is the ***“I AM”*** who has intervened with saving power so many times in the history of Israel! And in last Sunday’s Gospel, in the feeding of the 5,000, was a repeat of Israel’s being fed with the manna in the wilderness! So we really need to pay attention.

Understanding this enables us to see the relevance of this miracle for us today! And it’s this:

In the person of Jesus, Immanuel, the great “I AM” has come to dwell with us and is with us always! No matter what the circumstance!

“Where two or three are come together in my name, there am I with them.” [Matt 18:20]

He is with us to reassure us and calm us when the storms threaten us, and gives us confidence to step out in faith. As a matter of fact, like Peter, we are commanded to step out, knowing that the storms of this life cannot overcome us!

He assures us and says to us:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.” [Isaiah 43:1-2]

This miracle, like all miracles, is a sign pointing out who this Jesus is, his power and his authority.

And this miracle of Jesus walking on water and, at his command, Peter walking on the water towards Jesus, is a **sign**:

TO SHOWS US that even in the midst of our greatest fears Jesus is with us, and says:

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

TO SHOWS US what can happen when we trust and respond to the call of Jesus.

TO SHOWS US that, when we STEP OUT IN FAITH on the word of Jesus, his power will lift us up and allows us to weather the storms of life! And with confidence in the Lord declare:

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Phil 4:13

And **IT SHOWS US** that when we begin to doubt and feel that the storms of life are going to overwhelm us, that Jesus will reach out to us!

He reaches out to us, and in Word and sacrament assures us and declares [John 14:18]:

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

And when we respond in faith we’ll discover, to our relief, that we are not abandoned by God! We’ll also discover that our doubts and fears, while the cause for a rebuke from our Lord, do not, in fact take us outside of his care and concern. Quite the contrary!

We are never, ever, outside his caring, loving, arms! He will never abandon us!

That’s his pledge and guarantee, signed in the blood he shed on the cross, and confirmed by his resurrection!

The Lord grant us grace to keep our focus on Jesus, who speaks to us:

“Take courage! IT IS I. Don’t be afraid.”. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor John Simboras 9 August 2020