

Pentecost 9 8/10/14
Matthew 14:22-34 13A

“TAKE HEART; IT IS I. DO NOT BE AFRAID.”

100 years is a long time. As our community of Beulah celebrates her centennial, we are privileged to look back and see how our community has grown and changed in 100 years. And, we are able to look back and see 100 years of God’s presence and grace. Our community of Beulah is part of the “good government” that Luther teaches us to pray for in his little Catechism.

Perhaps, we could say that celebrating a centennial proves that the only constant in earthly life is change. Look at the changes in our community. 100 years ago {the congregation of Concordia did not even exist in Beulah, BTW}, we would be worshipping in German, rather than singing only 1 stanza “auf Deutsch.” Dirt roads have given way to paved highways. A single school building has given way to 3-modern, state-of-the-art school buildings. The coal and oil industry have given us well-paying careers. Horse and buggies have given way to horseless carriages.

And, dare I say it – you’ve changed too. The high school graduates have become the brides and grooms, who have become the parents, and grandparents, and the great-grandparents. Maybe you’re not a 3rd or 4th generation Beulah resident, but came, thinking you would be here a year or two and move on and now you are still here, because your children, and grandchildren are here.

We live in an ever changing world. We can recall with nostalgic fondness those good ol’ days, we can laugh at those high school graduation and wedding pictures, with a tear in our eyes, we remember those are no longer with us. But, honestly, how ready are you to give up

today to live in the good ol' days of yesterday? Are you ready to go back to the hand crank windows in your car? How about the days of starting your car with a hand crank? Outhouses, instead of indoor plumbing, anyone?

Not all the changes in the world have been good. Building a community meant building your own church and living in eager expectation until that congregation was large enough to afford her own pastor. In our world today, especially among the young, you literally have to carry them inside to get them to church. Marriage is treated as a curse, by homosexuals and heterosexuals, alike. The legalization of marijuana has given society one more challenge, the full effects of which we may not see for another generation. Electronic media has given us instant communication, and lewdness in the privacy of our own home, as well as bigger, better platforms to defame and curse our neighbor. We can simply say with the hymn writer, "Change and decay in all around I see." And, we wonder what tomorrow holds.

Like the disciples in our lesson, we can find ourselves afraid. The waves beat upon us, the wind is against us, and we are afraid because we think that Jesus is not with us.

Dear Saints of God, Jesus says to you this day, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." God works good in all things. He uses the wind and waves of this fallen world to drive us to Jesus, and faith in Jesus casts out all fear.

Jesus intentionally sent the twelve across the lake without Him. Our lesson begins right after our lesson from last week ends. Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. Now, well fed, the crowd had a plan. The Evangelist John tells us, "[Jesus perceived] that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king" (6:15).

So, Matthew tells us, Jesus forced the disciples into the boat in order to get away from the temptation of the crowd. The Lord knew that His disciples were spiritually too immature to stand up against the emotional appeal of the crowd. They could very well have become caught up in the emotionalism of the moment and thought it would be a good idea to make Jesus a king.

Many of the twelve were fishermen. So, a three-hour trip in a boat across the sea of Galilee was no big deal. But, as they sailed, the boat...”was beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them”.

“’Beaten’ by the waves”. St. Matthew uses an interesting choice of words in his Gospel. The word that our English Bible translates as “beaten” really means more like “tormented, afflicted”. St. Paul, for example, uses this same word in telling us of his thorn in the flesh. The Apostle writes, “a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment, afflict me”. Do the wind and waves of life in a sinful world torment, afflict you?

You trained up your child in the way of Lord. But now, have they broken your heart by departing from it, to be conformed to this world? Has the deteriorating health of your spouse left you physically and emotionally exhausted, not to mention financially strapped? Or, maybe it’s the demands of aging parents who do not always appreciate hearing your advice.

Like the disciples, like Peter, My Dear Friends in Christ, we see only the wind and the waves, we feel the torment in our bones and affliction in the very core of our beings, and we are terrified. We are terrified because we think that Jesus is not with us.

II. When the disciples were terrified and cried out in fear, Jesus came to them and spoke, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." Jesus came to them in the middle of the storm and strife. Jesus casts out all fear.

Just as Jesus came to the disciples, He came to us. Very God of Very God dwelt among us in human flesh to take our sin to the death of the cross, to crush the head of the devil, and remove the sting of the grave with His glorious resurrection the third day. Jesus. He is our only comfort, our only joy, our only hope, as we sail through the wind and waves of this valley of the shadow of death.

III. Was Peter a man of faith? If he was a man of faith, why did he get into trouble? Dear Friends in Christ: this is what our lesson is all about this morning. Of course, Peter was a man of faith, he was a Christian. But when the storm is raging, when he sees the waves out of the corner of his eye, he loses sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as he kept his sight fixed on Jesus, he was safe, the storm had no effect upon him. But when the object of our faith, the Lord Christ, goes out of our focus, fear is quick to take over. With our eyes off of Jesus, we look only to ourselves. We see only how helpless and weak we are. Like Peter, we begin to sink. And it is only the rescuing hand of the Savior that saves us.

As Peter and the Lord enter the boat, the winds quit their violent blowing. The seas obey the command of Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, the Master of wind and wave.

This was a miracle, a moment when a mighty act of God's grace was breaking into this fallen world. This is why our Lord made the twelve get into the boat and allowed the storm to torment them. He did not want them to doubt, but believe. So, He showed them that He is God who has power over all, even our greatest enemy, death.

No storm, no wind, no wave, not even death itself can take Christ's care from us. He is always there with us, stretching forth his hand to save us. We rejoice in the words of our Introit,

“I sought the Lord, and He answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles”.

Faith in Jesus Christ does not give immunization against the effects of a sinful, fallen world. However, faith makes us aware of our Lord's presence in the midst of the problems and perils we face. Paul writes in our Epistle, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”. Through the hearing of the Word, the spoken Word and the visible Word of the Sacraments, God works faith in us, faith that always sees Jesus.

Our Lord sees our hearts failing, and He reaches out to us in the midst of every difficulty and disaster, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid”. In the midst of any storm, our assurance comes from the Lord Jesus Christ and from Him alone. Faith always looks to Jesus and cries, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

In the new birth of our baptism, Jesus claimed us as His own. We belong to God, we are the sheep of His pasture. Come what may, we are His! Even in the midst of death, He does not forsake us nor leave us. He is our Shepherd, who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death to be with Him in the green pastures and still waters of heaven forever.

In the midst of any storm, there is nothing more reassuring for us to hear than our Savior's voice, “Be of good cheer! It is I, do not be afraid.” Christ Jesus has conquered all storms, we are safe in Him, and we are bold to sing:

“Lord, when the tempest rages, I need not fear;
For you, the Rock of Ages, are always near.
Close by Your side abiding, I fear no foe,
For when Your hand is guiding, in peace I go {*LSB 722:2*}.”