

Pentecost 11 8/13/23
Matthew 14:22-33 14A

JESUS IMMEDIATELY REACHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOOK HOLD OF HIM.

When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD (Ex 14:10).

Think about that for a moment, Dear Children of the Heavenly Father. They had just been delivered from the land of death. They had witnessed with their own eyes, the Nile turning to blood; the frogs, the gnats, the flies, the hail, the locusts, the darkness – all of which afflicted the Egyptians, but not them, by the way. Especially that 10th and most dreadful of plagues. The firstborn in the land of Egypt was struck down; but the homes of God's children were marked their homes with the blood of the lamb, and the angel of death passed over their homes, sparing their firstborn. And when they left that land of death, the Egyptians were so glad they were leaving that they gave them their silver and gold, the clothes right off their back (cf. Ex 12:35). They saw God leading them with the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

But now, now, their eyes saw the Red Sea water before them and Pharaoh and his army behind them, and they feared greatly.

You've been afraid, haven't you? Fear always has to do with the fact that you are **not** getting your way. You are not in control. And that can be terrifying for us poor sinners. This Sunday, we hear once again the GOOD NEWS of the Christian faith: you don't have to be in control, the Lord your God is.

You will recall from last Sunday's Gospel that even when Jesus went to a desolate place, the crowd pressed in on Him. He had compassion on

them and healed their sick. He not only fed the 5,000 men plus women and children with five loaves and two fish, but each of the twelve disciples filled a basket with leftovers. Then immediately, He sends the disciples into the boat to sail before Him to the other side. Yes, remember what their eyes had just witnessed; not to mention the fact they were sailing at the very command of the Lord Jesus Himself, and those same eyes see wind and waves, and their boat ready to sink, and their eyes are filled with fear. They were terrified.

On this side of heaven, our eyes see a lot to be afraid of. You walk into the hospital room, and there lies your spouse, your parent, and what can you do for them? The harvest is beginning, we pray for an abundant crop, but will the hail destroy it first? Will you even be able to break even with the price you get for it? You raised your children to fear the Lord, now you see them doing things, living a life, that grieves the heart of God and pierces your own heart, as well. You've been kind and considerate and received nothing but injustice in return. All this shooting and looting and crime in our streets. We're afraid at what our eyes see. And it just seems that we are going to drown and perish in the deep.

Where are you, Jesus? That's what we want to know, isn't it? Let me tell you where Jesus is. In the 4th watch of the night, that's 4-6 AM for you and me, Jesus comes to them. He doesn't get in His kayak; or fly in an airplane to the other side. He walks on the water. They see Him and they are even more afraid and think they see a ghost, so He says to them, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (v. 27). But you and I both know it sometimes doesn't work that way. Jesus is there; we know that. We believe that. But still, we are greatly afraid; terrified.

Look at Peter. “Lord, if it is you.” “If, if, it is you...” Prove it to me Jesus! Prove to my reason and senses that it’s really you Jesus!

In your Baptism, Jesus made you that promise, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Yet, we are like Peter, “Lord, if it is you!” “If it is you, Jesus, prove it!” Let the wind and waves beat on us, let us be afraid of drowning in the deep, and there you are like Gideon throwing out your fleece before God, “Prove it to my reason and senses, God, that you are there, that you are with me, that I shouldn’t be afraid”. We become so engrossed in our worries and fears, we are not certain Jesus is there to do what Jesus does. What happened to Peter, happens to you – you sink.

“Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of Him” (v. 31). Peter was going down, so Jesus reaches into the water and pulls Peter up when he begins to sink. When you start to sink, Jesus reaches you and pulls you out. He saves you with His own hand. Take a look at that hand. Go ahead. Take a good, long look at that hand.

What’s in it? What is He holding in the palm of that hand? Your sins, your worries, your doubts, your little faith. It’s all right there, in Jesus’ hand. And He takes all of that into His hand so that when he gets to Calvary, that hand is nailed to the cross and that hand begins to bleed. And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, all your doubts, all your worries, all your fears. Jesus takes away all your sins, your doubts, your worries, your fears by bleeding and dying on that cross. And He rises the 3rd day to day to come to you to say, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

The boat was beaten by the wind and waves, and the disciples were terrified. When Peter saw the wind, he was afraid. Allow me to ask you a question: Did the disciples perish in the deep? Did Peter drown? Was

Noah washed away in the flood waters? Did Abraham slaughter Isaac? Are the walls of Jericho still standing? Did Goliath slay David? Did Elijah starve? Did the flames in the fiery furnace consume Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Did the lions eat Daniel?

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our human eyes will see many dangers, toils, and snares in this valley of the shadow of death. By in the new birth of our Baptism, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us, so that we walk by faith, not by sight. As He does His work in us through the hearing of His Word and the eating and drinking of Christ's own Body and Blood to increase and strengthen that faith, so that we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who is risen and conquered our greatest enemy, death itself. We fix our eyes on Jesus, our Good Shepherd, whose rod and staff comfort and cheer us in all the strive of mortal life.

“Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him” (v. 31). Take a look at that hand. That is the hand of Jesus. And he holds you in the palm of that hand, and no one and nothing, not even death itself, can snatch you out of it. “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.