

“God is not Little”

Matthew 14:22-33

In our Gospel reading last week, we were witnesses to Jesus feeding the 5000. The meal in the wilderness had ended, and Jesus tells the disciples to get into a boat and set sail for the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while He dismisses the crowd and spends some time in prayer.

He wanted them to have some time to rest, and He wanted to have some time alone to pray – as was His custom. I believe this speaks volumes in regard to the value of an active prayer life.

Jesus is True God; there is nothing He does not know; there is nothing He cannot accomplish; yet even He seeks out His Father in heaven and is refreshed with some quiet time with His Father. Quite often when our lives get hectic, the tendency is to cut out time with God. That merely compounds the problem. After all, it is Christ our Lord who says, “Come to Me all you who are wearied and burdened and I will give you rest.”

What God brings is refreshing, strengthening, nourishing, and is therefore very different from what the world offers. The fellowship and communion we have with Him demonstrates how intently God desires to be an active part of your life.

Jesus comes to the disciples across the water. He shows them that no amount of time, or space, or any storm can remove Jesus Christ from those who believe in Him.

St. Paul expressed his understanding of this truth in his letter to the

Romans which we read two weeks ago, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” [Rom. 8:38-39].

The Christ who comes across the water and demonstrates that nothing can separate Him from His people is not content to be recognized as a ghost, or a divine Someone, or a divine Something. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He is the One promised to Adam – the Son of God who would be born of a woman. He is the One True God who has power over all of creation. He has the power to feed a multitude of people with but a handful of food. He has the power to defy any laws of science. If He wanted to, He could make the sun go dark in the middle of the day even without the moon blocking it. He has the power to walk on water. He has the power to heal any illness. He has the authority to forgive any sin.

He comes to those who are filled with terror, identifies Himself and replaces terror with faith. He says: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” This faith that is created in the heart brings with it the desire for personal communion with Christ. If you have faith, you desire to be with Him, to hear His voice, to partake of His gifts.

On the other side of that coin, the reality is that if you do not desire to commune with Christ, if hearing His voice or partaking of His gifts is a low priority, then you have deemed the Word of God to be unimportant which by definition means that you do not have faith – regardless of what it says on the church roster or your baptismal certificate. I know that is hard to hear as we think about all those whom we love for whom participation in the Word and Sacrament life of the church is a low priority. But that is the reality, which is why, as I said last week, they need someone to intervene in their life and spiritually “give them something to eat.”

When Peter heard that it was the Lord who was on the water, he immediately said: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Christ says to Peter a word that is not unfamiliar to him. Jesus says: “Come.”

Now Peter demonstrates great faith and steps out of a perfectly good boat and does that which is impossible for any ordinary person to do. He got out of the boat, and he walked on the water. But, as Matthew records, when he saw the wind, he became afraid and began to doubt. And as he began to doubt, he began to sink.

Our faith is often very much like Peter’s. God calls us to a life of faith, and through His power, extraordinary things happen in our lives – most of which cannot be seen with the naked eye. We have been washed clean of all of our sin by God Himself: something no ordinary person could do for us. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, we have the sure promise of eternal life and salvation that no ordinary person could give to us, nor could we provide it for ourselves.

But just like Peter, who became distracted and fearful of the wind, as Matthew very clearly points out, we also tend to get distracted and doubt when turbulent times occur in our lives. When Peter first was on the water, it was great. He was doing something extraordinary. It was exciting. But when he saw the wind, he began to sink.

This is one of my favorite observations in all of Scripture. If you are standing on top of open water, wind is not your problem.

Later Christ told Peter that the problem was that his faith was little. Peter’s faith was little because he saw Christ and Christ’s power as being little, or at least being littler than the wind that threatened him.

When things are rolling along smoothly in your life, you are happy and excited about the wonderful, extraordinary things that God is doing for you. Life is great. However, when you are faced with turbulent times, when the

wind and the waves of trouble, or illness, or an uncertain future knock you about, God is often viewed as being littler than the “wind” in your life. If this view is allowed to continue, God will eventually become a low priority and finally become unimportant.

Peter was so caught up in the apparent danger posed by the wind that he was blind to the incredible miracle that, through Christ’s power, he was standing on top of the water in the first place. When he began to doubt and subsequently began to sink, Peter cried out, “Lord, save me!” If only Peter would have realized that Christ was saving him from sinking all along.

Be careful not to make the same mistake and become distracted by all of the “wind” in your lives. You cannot save yourselves from sinking when trouble arises. It is solely through the power, mercy, and grace of God that we did not sink into the depths long ago. God has been saving you all along.

Like with Peter and the disciples, this faith that God has created in our hearts is not based on our own personal whims, preferences, desires, or sentiment. Our faith is founded in the Word of God. The world around us thinks that the promises of God in which we place our faith make no more sense than stepping out of a perfectly good boat and trusting that we will walk on the water. Apart from Christ and His Word, that would be true. On our own, we have the same chance of successfully walking on water as we do providing for our own forgiveness, life, and salvation.

None of this can be accomplished without God and without us being called to put our faith in that which on the surface does not seem possible. But, as we know, with God, all things are possible. It is possible even for sinners such as Peter, you, and me to be righteous in God’s sight. Therefore, we look to Christ, and we join with the apostles proclaiming our faith and worshiping Him saying: “Truly you are the Son of God.” Amen.