

"LORD, Rescue Me!"
Matthew 14:22-33
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #65
10th Sunday After Pentecost
21st Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
8.9.20

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds.

23 When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. **24** Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. **25** Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed.

27 Just then Jesus spoke to them, “Be encouraged! It’s me. Don’t be afraid.”

28 Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s you, order me to come to you on the water.”

29 And Jesus said, “Come.”

Then Peter got out of the boat and was walking on the water toward Jesus.**30** But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, “Lord, rescue me!”

31 Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him, saying, “You man of weak faith! Why did you begin to have doubts?” **32** When they got into the boat, the wind settled down.

33 Then those in the boat worshipped Jesus and said, “You must be God’s Son!”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Matthew's retelling of today's story happens right after John the Baptist's beheading and Jesus feeding the multitude. It's interesting that the disciples still don't seem to understand who and what Jesus is all about by the time they are screaming in terror on the boat in the middle of chaotic waters. Think about it for a moment. They just witnessed Jesus breaking the five loaves of bread and two fishes to feed thousands of people, why can't they

seem to recognize that the storm will pass and this “ghost” is the Savior of the world? Instead, the disciples let their fear get the best of them. After convincing themselves that it’s a ghost walking on water, the disciples are so frightened that they scream!

I think we’ve all been there. Screaming in terror, like the disciples in the boat, not from the storm, but because we are more spooked by the help thinking it’s a threat....a ghost. And then the “ghost” says: “It’s me! Don’t be afraid!” This sounds strangely familiar, like when we are home alone and we hear a noise and our fear gets the best of us. Our adrenaline kicks in. Possibly, we say “hello” or “who’s there” and we do it again and more loudly, and then it turns out to be whomever we live with and they say “It’s me!” Instant

relief. But, our fears take us to the worst case scenario. It's an intruder or.....a GHOST!

Yet, I also firmly believe that we've all been Peter. Full of faith and somehow not enough of it. He's brave, no doubt! It's early in the morning and while the disciples are screaming in terror, in faith, he responds to Jesus' command to step out of the boat and walk on the water. Because of the Savior's encouraging words and his command to step onto the chaotic waters, Peter overcomes his initial fear.

Peter, full of faith, eventually gave into the fear of the winds. Peter, full of faith, eventually gave into the chaos of the water. Peter, full of faith, eventually took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink.

If we're being honest with ourselves, we can't blame Peter. We've been there, too! We start out full of faith and then we sink. It's as if we have divided minds. That is, we have faith, but our fears get the best of us. We're not focused. We know better, but our fearful instincts kick in. We're human after all.

If you think about this story and what's not being told, I wonder if Peter also lets the screams of his friends in the boat get the best of

him. Maybe you wonder about that, too. I get it, it's only speculation, but let's imagine that scenario together.

While the disciples were screaming in terror thinking they were seeing a ghost, Peter had the courage to say to Jesus: "LORD, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water." He follows Jesus' command. Peter's leadership was not only found in his trust that Jesus was not a spooky ghost, but also in his faithful response to the Savior's command to get out and walk on water as we read in Matthew 14:28-29.

In verse 30, that faith turns to fear. Yes, he sees how bad the strong wind is, but I think he also focuses on the cries of those in

the boat and not the voice of Jesus who is probably encouraging Peter. In an instant, Peter went from faith to fear and the waters nearly consumed him.

How many times have we had the courage to take those first metaphorical steps into the chaotic waters, seeing our LORD right in front of us who told us to come on out, only to eventually give into fear? How many times have we succumbed to the cacophony of voices who have convinced themselves that it's a ghost on the water and they refuse to get out because of the wind?

Yet, in all the chaos, regardless of our own mistakes, we cry out to be rescued and our Savior lovingly grabs us to save from our own

doing. The fear took over and we wouldn't focus on the calming gaze of our Savior and his words of comfort in the midst of the storm. Like Peter, our minds and hearts became unfocused. Instead of headed toward the Rock upon which our hope is built, we fell to the fearful voices and noises around us.

Today marks the 75th Anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan. The second atomic bomb to ever fall on a city. The first was three days prior in Hiroshima. For decades, survivors of the bombings called the *hibakusha* (hee-bak-sha) have gathered to commemorate the anniversaries and to promote a nuclear-free world. An article in the New York Times earlier this week talks about the *hibakusha*.¹ Over the years, their numbers have

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/05/world/asia/hiroshima-japan-75th-anniversary.html>

decreased due to age and death. Like the Holocaust survivors, there are fewer and fewer survivors who are able to tell the world of their experiences. And during the pandemic, even fewer were able to come out to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the bombings. Yet, for those who were able to come out this week, despite the pandemic, they have felt the urgency to show up. In the NYT article, it is said that they had come this far, so they can't quit.

But, those voices have seen the horrors of the atomic bombs not only of the instant deaths, but of the disease that has plagued many survivors for years. And they call for a world that doesn't give into the fear of making more nuclear weapons and, God forbid, using it on anyone again. They call for a world free of nuclear arms.

Instead of listening to the voices who feed off of fear, they are the

ones calling on us to not be afraid. But, in a world where distrust, hate, nationalism, and war continue, their diminishing voices seemed to be ignored.

These survivors who know first hand the effects of nuclear warfare are calling for denuclearization and increased restraint in our world. The survivors are fighting until the bitter end even though the chaotic winds and the fearful voices attempt to stop them. Despite their average age being 82, despite the pandemic, despite wicked forces at work in our world, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki continue to shun the chaos and answer the Savior's call to come walk on the chaotic water and respond to his calming words of "don't be afraid".

The Savior is calling us. We are on the chaotic seas and we're terrified at what we see and hear in our own boats. Jesus calls us to step out on the waters with him. The wind and the voices of fear are loud, but Jesus is right there calming us and telling us "don't be afraid".

Siblings in Christ, be encouraged! Believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.