

Ben Libby

Sermon

August 1st, Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the 14 chapter of Matthew, starting at verse 22:

Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. 24 By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, "It's a ghost!" 27 But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid." 28 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 Jesus said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid. As he began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 Those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!" 34 When they had crossed over, they came to the shore at Gennesaret.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Have you ever been in a situation where you could see something terrible unfolding right in front of your eyes?

I can remember one such occasion. Me and a few friends were at camp. We were trying to get a fire going when the night before, rain had soaked our firewood. Somebody (not me) had the bright idea to use gasoline to bolster our fire. There's a reason people always caution you against this. The person used a throwing motion while holding on to the canister. This way the liquid could be thrown at the fire from a distance. It worked. But the fire had traveled from the gasoline back up into the gas can. I remember seeing flames coming out of the spout of the gas can. It was like I could see the disaster unfolding in slow motion.

While this sight produced shouts from the other bystanders, I didn't say anything. I was too busy running as fast as I could in the opposite direction. The

sight of the flame coming out of the gas can invoked in me the "flight or fight" response. I flew. My friend was able to get it under control, I don't really remember how; I just ran. Afterwards, everyone started giving me grief. But I felt justified. Everyone should have done something similar, at least those who were just sitting there. In my mind, that can should've exploded. To this day, I am certain that the reason my friend who threw the gas that day walked away without any injury was only due to the fact that angels were working overtime.

The "flight or fight" is a response that is all people, and it most animals. It has since been renamed, "the flight, fight, or freeze" response. When encountering a fearful situation, most animals deal with it in one of those 3 ways. They either run away, become aggressive, or freeze.

Fear has a way of triggering these reactions. Which reaction happens usually depends on the

animal, and it also depends on the situation. There are many rabbits who frequent our lawn here. Many times, I won't even see them until I see them running away from me. But there are a few times when I see the bunny, it sees me, and it remains perfectly still.

In our text this morning, we see some similar tactics from the disciples. Their initial fear froze them. Peter journeyed into that fear and faltered. But their Lord was quick to save, and they would worship Him. Let us take the journey with them, and we will come to the same conclusion about Jesus, truly He is the Son of God! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

This chapter in Matthew is quite the wild ride. Jesus hears about the death of John the Baptist and wanted to be alone in prayer. He went to a deserted place. But the crowds followed Him. He had compassion on them and healed their sick. When it was clear that these crowds would not be able to both see Jesus and make it back to town for food, the disciples advised Him to send them away. Jesus did not. Instead, He took the little food that the disciples had, blessed it, and instructed them to feed the large crowd with five loaves of bread and two fish. Those five loaves and two fish feed over 5,000 people that day, and the left over far outweighed the original supplies.

Our text picks up with Jesus's original intention. He dismissed the crowds, told His disciples to go ahead of Him in their boat, and He retired to a mountain to pray. These men had quite a bit of experience in boating, as most of them were previously fishermen before becoming disciples. Yet, they were toiling quite a distance from the shore. The wind and the waves were boisterous on this occasion. They weren't necessarily afraid of these conditions. But what came next truly made them afraid.

24 By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 In the fourth watch of the

night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea.

This might be the most famous of all the miracles in the Bible. Even people who have never read the Bible or know about Jesus in the slightest will recognize the reference of "walking on water". It's a phrase that we still might use today. If we consider someone to "walk on water", it means that we view that person as special, perfect in our eyes.

But Jesus walking on water didn't provoke esteem originally. It was a fearful thing. The disciples cried out, "**It's a ghost!**", in fear. They had been around Jesus for some time now. They had seen, literally, miraculous stuff out of Him. But this was on another level. This was not normal. I think they reacted in a way that almost every single human ever would. They were frozen in fear.

It was probably easy for these disciples to forget about Jesus prior to this moment. They were going through adverse conditions. The relentless pounding of the wind and the waves held their attention. They were focused on simply getting through it.

What storm are you rowing through? We all deal with daily adversity in some way, shape, or form. It can be so easy to become so focused on our tasks that we forget about our All-mighty God and Savior. When there's nothing we can do, when we're helpless, the prayers flow fast. But when we have things to do, tasks to accomplish, we forget about where we always need to turn to. The disciples went through this storm for a reason. It would teach them an unforgettable lesson about trusting Jesus.

Here they saw Jesus, sometime in between 3 and 6 am, strolling on water. The sight froze them. Of the 3 reactions, fight, flight, or freeze, this is probably the most dangerous one. Those rabbits will freeze when they see me coming. But if I was rabbit hunting, that's the outcome I want the most.

Fear has a way of paralyzing us all. Something bad happens, and we just don't do anything. We get so stressed that we can't even do the simplest task.

We might freeze up in denial. Like by not doing anything, the bad thing might not see us.

When we see something fearful, don't freeze! Do you know what you are to do when you see a bear in the forest? It may depend on the situation, but panicking is the worst response. You could run in the opposite direction. But that might incite the bear to chase you. You might freeze and get super quiet. But the bear might not notice you then, and get closer and closer, and increase the chances of you surprising it and making it turn aggressive. No, what you are supposed to do is get big and loud! Go to high ground, and announce loudly, "Get away bear!" It may seem counter intuitive, but by announcing your presence, it will get its attention, and most likely avoid you.

When something we fear actually happens to us, get big and loud. The best way to do that is to go to church, the highest of high grounds. Here we learn just how big our God truly is. We are not big and powerful, especially when something fearful is happening. But our God is the biggest, most powerful force in the universe. Get bolstered in your faith. Remember the promises He has given you. Then get loud! Praise Him and pray to Him.

It shouldn't surprise us that it is Peter who makes the first move in this situation. **27 But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, "Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid."** **28 Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."** **29 Jesus said, "Come!"**

Jesus is quick to dispel their fear. Immediately, Jesus is telling them to take heed, don't be afraid, "It is I!"

I don't know what possessed Peter to make this statement. Truly I don't. It comes from a place of genuine faith. I don't think he's testing the Lord at any time in this. Maybe he's just trying to verify that this entity is the same Lord they had left behind. Peter said, **Lord, if it is you.** It was Him. So, He commanded Peter like he had proposed. **29 Jesus said, "Come!"**

Jesus walked on water. This actually happened. He did not somehow find a path of steppingstones to reach the disciple's boat. He physically did something that none of us could ever do. This was simply incredible by every definition of the word. But what is even more incredible is that Peter is also able to do the same. **Jesus said, "Come!" Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus.** Jesus walking on water? That's one thing. But Peter being able to do the same through the command and Word of Jesus, that's even more incredible!

Or is it? If Jesus says, "come and walk on the water with me" then faith says, "yes Lord". Those who trust in the Lord by faith can also do miraculous things! If you think about it, this stroll on the sea of Galilee isn't any different from anything we do by faith. We also are emboldened by the powerful Word of Christ to do phenomenal things. We preach the Word and turn sinners doomed to hell into saints destined to heaven. It's nothing that we ourselves actually do. Jesus does something that we could never do, and then allows Peter to do that very same thing that he could never have done! The power wasn't in Peter's feet. The power was in the Word of Jesus!

But Peter's faith faltered when he took his eyes off Christ. **30 But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid. As he began to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"** **31 Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"**

What got Peter there? It wasn't how windy the wind was. It wasn't how boisterous the waves were. Rather, it was Peter himself. **But when he saw** It was Peter own doubt that sunk him.

Doubt is a product of fear. Sometimes it's good to be doubtful. That is, it can be good skeptical, to not be naïve. If someone tells you something, you want to check the validity of that statement. Paul praised the Bereans for as much. He preached Jesus to them, and they checked out what he said to what the scriptures said. But therein lies the key difference. It's

good to not be naïve, but when the Word of God is spoken, believe it! **They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed (Act 17:11-12 NKJ)**

Peter believed by faith that this was Jesus. He showed as much when he set out on the water that morning. But he lost focus of his Savior, and in so doing, quite quickly he was submerged. **As he began to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”**

Even when our faith falters, even when we have moments of doubt, even when we fail to keep our focus on our Lord, He’s still there to keep us from drowning in our fears. That’s how much He loves us! What is the word after Peter cries out while he is going down? **Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him** Yes, Peter should have trusted the whole way out to Jesus. Jesus even says: **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** We can only shake our heads and say, “Why don’t I just trust Jesus all of the time and just quit being afraid!?” But the point is that even during all those times when we fail our Lord, He won’t fail us. He will catch us, and in His strong hands we are safe and need never fear.

Once Jesus catches the disciple (the rock who certainly sank like one) He gets into the boat with them, and the strong wind immediately dies down. The disciple’s reaction? They worship Him. **“Truly you are the Son of God!”** Some people claim that Jesus never claimed to be God. They have no idea what they are talking about. If Jesus wasn’t God, He would have never allowed this worship to happen. But He is God, and this worship isn’t misplaced, it’s absolutely appropriate.

Another proof that this is God here? What does Jesus say to comfort the frozen stiff with fear disciples? **“Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid.”**

Last Sunday, we talked about Moses and his asking God what name he should take with him as to Whom sent him. What did God say? **I AM WHO I AM.**

When Jesus says here, “It is I”, it is the say thing. They didn’t need to be afraid because it is Jesus. He says, “Courage! I AM!!!”

When we are afraid, that fight, flight, or freeze sets in quite naturally. But “fight” might be the most unnatural of all those reactions. Flight? Freeze? We do those things almost automatically. Fighting takes some training.

Let’s go back to the bear example. Getting big and loud is supposed to trigger in the bear the flight response. But, if it is a mother bear, and you are getting big and loud but in the way of her and her cubs, then things are going to play out differently. There is nothing more dangerous in the wild then a mother bear who feels like her cubs are in danger.

There is nothing more powerful than our Father when we are in danger. Whereas a bear may not know the whole situation, your Father always does. You may think, “Why isn’t God stepping in here?” at times. I’m sure the disciple thought at 3am, “Why did Jesus send us out here? Where is He?” He always knows what is best for us! We may deal with adversity at times. We may live with it constantly. But He always has you in His sights. We need to remember to keep Him in ours. When we do, we never sink!

We have a fighting faith. It is one that is not based on us, but rather our faith gets it fight from the One who conquers, Jesus Christ! He is true God and true Man. Don’t ever limit what your flesh and blood Savior can do! He walks on water. He walks through walls. He also does what no one else can, FORGIVE SINS!!! His flesh and blood are even present with us today. It is in the bread and wine. How is that possible? I don’t know. How was He able to walk on water, or feed the 5,000? He is miraculous. The greatest miracle of all time wasn’t Jesus walking on water. It was Him forgiving us our sins and making us children of God. The real miracle with water is the water with which you have been baptized into His holy family.

Dear Christians, you don’t need to freeze or fly. Those are certainly natural, but we are no longer natural, are we? We are reborn through the

forgiveness of sins. We are powerful and strong! We can fight! How? How can you be determined in the face of the gravest fear? You have Jesus, who is strong and swift to save. Keep your focus on Him! If you find yourself losing focus, cry out like Peter did, **“Lord, save me!”** and you will find a ready hand to lift you up! In His saving name we pray, AMEN!!!