

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 10A - Proper 14A
August 9, 2020
Matthew 14:22-33

The Audacity of Faith

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. (Matthew 14:25-29 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Most people think that audacity is a bad thing. Indeed, one of the definitions of audacity is "rude or disrespectful behavior; impudence." or, "effrontery or insolence; shameless boldness." Since we see so many examples of this in our world and, perhaps, even in ourselves, it's little wonder that the word evokes mostly negative reactions.

But there is also a more positive aspect to audacity. It's "the willingness to take bold risks" or "boldness or daring, especially with confident or arrogant disregard for personal safety, conventional thought, or other restrictions." With that definition in mind, we see in today's Gospel "the audacity of faith."

The meal is over. More than 5,000 people had been fed from only five loaves and two fish, and twelve baskets were needed to hold the leftovers. Jesus compelled the disciples to get into the boat and leave while He dismissed the crowd. Once He was alone, Jesus went off by Himself to pray. At last Jesus had some time alone to spend with His Father as He mourned the death of John the Baptist. Exhibiting an audacious faith, He prayed well into the night.

In the meantime, the disciples struggled against the wind and the waves to make headway toward the other side of the lake. What should have been a trip of only a couple of hours had turned into an all night affair. They were undoubtedly a bit tired.

So it's little wonder that when they saw Jesus walking toward them on the surface of the lake, they were rather frightened. They thought they were seeing a ghost, or a phantom. And it was this sight that frightened them, not the wind and the waves.

At that moment, Jesus calms their fears with a Word, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." It's like a child having a bad dream or being frightened during a storm. A parent comes to the child's room and gently says, "Don't be afraid. I'm right here. It's ok." Such is the power of the

spoken word to strengthen and comfort. And how much more when spoken by Christ Himself. For when the creator of the world, the one “who shut in the sea with doors” and established its limits (Job 38:8, 10), says there’s nothing to fear, there is really nothing to fear, especially from Him. His Word does what it says, and He is there to guard and protect them from all danger and harm.

Then Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” What audacity! Who had ever heard such a thing? Yet, Peter was confident that if Jesus said the word, then he too could walk on the water. Such is the audacity of faith to so trust Jesus’ word to do what it says. Peter had seen Jesus’ miracles and had heard Him preach and teach. He knew full well that Jesus could override the natural order of things as He did in turning water into wine and feeding the 5,000. He also knew that he didn’t dare climb out of the boat on his own initiative. Rather, he trusted that if Jesus so commanded him, then he could walk on the water. He knew Jesus wouldn’t harm him. He waited for the sure Word from Christ.

So Jesus commanded Peter, “Come.” And Peter, with that word from Jesus, climbed out of the boat and walked on the water. Imagine the audacious faith it must have taken to do such a thing. After all, being a fisherman, Peter knew that people can’t and don’t walk on water. Yet, here he was doing just that.

But it isn’t long before we see that it wasn’t the strength of Peter’s faith that enabled him to walk on the water. For before he can relish the moment, his faith begins to waver. Rather than keeping his eyes on Jesus, rather than continue trusting Jesus, he sees the waves and the wind. His attention is taken off Jesus and he is scared and “begins” to sink. And now we see the audacity of faith once again. For as he began to sink, he cried, “Lord, save me!” That’s audacious! For even now he still believed that Jesus could, and would, save him.

“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” Indeed, this is exactly what Jesus had come to do. He had come to save Peter, the disciples, you, me, and the whole world from their sin and unbelief. He had come to save in a manner greater than simply reaching out His hand to catch Peter. But Peter didn’t realize that at the moment. All he knew was that when he cried, “Lord, save me!”, Jesus did.

“And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” Now this wasn’t the stilling of the storm, as on an earlier occasion, but it was magnificent nonetheless. For the other disciples had seen what had happened with and to Peter. They had seen for themselves how Jesus brings rescue and peace. They too, having a little faith, had been strengthened for their further work in God’s kingdom. For even their “little faith” was audacious when its object was Jesus, the Son of God.

We too have heard Jesus say, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28). Come, take up your cross and follow Me (Matt. 16:24).” But we do not walk on water. That is not given us to do. Rather, we come to Jesus as we are, sinners

through and through. By the power of God's Word, we have come to Jesus, or, rather, Jesus has come to us. Through the water of Holy Baptism, we have been rescued from the deadly waves which would kill us and we have been placed into the safety of the boat of His Church.

Still, all is not peace and rest. The winds and the waves of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh beat against that boat, and hinder our drawing near to Jesus. And as we struggle against these, we tire and become fearful. We suffer periods of unbelief, doubt, and fear, even when we see an occasional bright spot. Though we know that Jesus died for all our sins on the cross, though we know that our heavenly Father watches over us at all times, we too are "of little faith." You see, we may at times think we're stronger than we really are. We may at times trust in our own efforts, even our own believing, to carry us through the sea of life to the other side. Too often, we are distracted by the cares and concerns of this world, and we doubt Jesus' Word. So, as we try to "weather the storm," we turn to our Savior as our last resort rather than as the first source of strength to endure all that troubles us.

Then, as we realize our great need and our utter inability to save ourselves, we too cry out, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus does, not by reaching out His hand, but by stretching out His hands. For He saves us by His death on the cross. He saves us by taking all our sins upon Himself. He saves us by making us His children through the flood of Holy Baptism. He saves us through the Word of Absolution. He saves us through His very Body and Blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins.

And with the forgiveness of sins we also receive joy, gladness, consolation, hope, a good conscience, strength to fight the good fight, a new heart that desires to attain a godly life, encouragement for all discouragement, divine perspective, a vision of the future, peace of mind, release from guilt, the promise of a perfect glory, communion with God which will be perfect satisfaction and rest. For God's Word and Sacraments as we have right here are the "still small voice" of Jesus telling us not to fear for He is here. And as we see and hear over and over again that our sins are forgiven, we too declare, "Truly You are the Son of God." For He continues to save us and deliver us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. So listen to your Savior who comes to you, "O you of little faith, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'" And at the last, He will bring you safely to the other side and all the winds will cease. Then, with Peter, the other disciples, and all the saints who have gone before us, we will join in unending worship and praise of our Savior. God grant you such an audacious faith, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener