

Proper 14 A  
St. Matthew 14:22-33  
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St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## Lose the Doubt and Fear

*"But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'"*

I doubt that I am ever going to win the lottery, and no matter how much I either need or would like that, I am not shaking in my boots with that knowledge. A lot of doubts are quite reasonable and do not bring fear along with them. Other doubts are fraught with fear. In my lifetime we have been taught to fear and doubt many things. We even doubt the messengers who bring us news of the calamities. Who then can we trust?

Doubts about the future are strong these days, whether it is our own or our collective future. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives there is plenty to leave us shaking in our boots with a pervasive sense of dread, doom and gloom. This past week, with threats of nuclear bombs in Guam and perhaps other bombs raining down on the West Coast of the United States, that anxiety became real. The government of Guam passed out cards with Civil Defense warnings on them, telling people not to look into the glare from the burst of bombs, so as not to blind themselves. Well what about the radiation that would kill you, someone asked, let alone the force of the things? These warnings reminded me of the warnings not to look into the

solar eclipse next Monday, for the same reason. Solar eclipses used to leave people in great fear, as though the world were coming to an end, before science provided an explanation for them. Newscasters told us last week that this is the worst crisis since the Cuban Missile Crisis back in 1962. I lived through that. Somehow, this does not feel quite the same. I sense there is a bit of hyperbole there. My doubts are working full time, maybe to protect me from just collapsing under the weight of anxiety and fear. Maybe my own life-experience causes me to doubt the veracity of this possibility. It is easier just to go on about your business, rather than be consumed with worry. That's what many on Guam are doing, though others in Guam report it is hard to go to sleep at night not knowing if you will ever wake up.

But is this really the worst crisis for America, as the media would have us believe? I have my doubts. How soon have we forgotten 9/11, the first attack since the war of 1812 on American soil, and which killed more Americans than Pearl Harbor? No wonder I have my doubts, which is not to minimize the general threat to humanity that this brings. So I am left feeling a little numb by the whole thing.

Speaking of belief, there are all sort of Catastrophe's peddled today for our consumption to keep you watching the 24 hour news, so they can also bombard you with advertisements for *Zeepa* sleep aids to stop the fearsome snoring, or the latest *Chevy*, or "*Weathertech*" floor-mats for your car. *Look at that- I have been watch so much of the news, I can actually recite the sponsors, even though I am want to buy their products!* Consider just a few of the major worries presented to you to raise your doubts and anxiety each day: Besides missile attacks there are other impending wars around the world, wretched inhumanity to man, illnesses such as cancer

and disease, violent weather and storms, wildfires, threats of power outages, EMP's, and food and water shortages. (*Maybe they are sold out of Bush's baked beans and did you hear Hormel can't keep up with shipments and demand for SPAM?*) And then there is the Heroin epidemic, urban violence, social strife that becomes violent like in Virginia yesterday, (*hard for me to see how the latest violence compares with that what happened to black people in the 50's and 60's when the local government was also involved in perpetrating the violence- yet we lived through that*) and of course there is the persistent threat of terrorism. And then, not to forget, we are led to be anxious about insect borne diseases such as Lyme and West Nile Virus. And who isn't afraid of *bed bugs*? There is so much to fear in our world today, and there is no doubt about it. The list could go on, but I'll stop here. You didn't come to church to have your anxieties raised this morning. Likely you want some relief and you would like to quell them. So, I ask, where is faith as a remedy for doubt in all this?

Lest we forget, there is a lot of money to be made off our anxieties and doubts about the future. Advertisers love to play with our fears. They sell all sorts of bug sprays, emergency kits and ways to prepare for the worst.

It is no wonder that the Prepper movement has taken strong hold now in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Prepping is a way to cope with your anxiety, to bring some modicum control back to your life, in the face of all these modern fears. Yet the calamities, if the truth be told, are usually much greater than our humble preparations to either bring control to our lives or to escape them. There must be another way to live! We can't live with doubt 24/7.

Who will *save me* from all these problems? Who can I trust to tell me what to do? Where is God in the midst of all these fears? And where can I go where it will be safe? Peter got out of his safe place this morning, didn't he? God invited him to step out of his safe place and to walk in faith toward God. God will not let you fall nor sink into the mire or the oceans deep, nor will any real harm come to you. God will protect you. Why do you doubt? Why do you lose faith? Is it because the doubts and fears are so overwhelming?

I remember reading a book in seminary about faith and doubt. They are flip sides of the same coin. In fact, you can't have faith without doubt. Without doubt, everything in God's creation would be a certainty, and there would be no need for faith. Yet doubt allows us to choose God over our fears, and doubt allows us to choose real life and hope. Having faith in God not only gives us hope but also strengthens us to trust God to bring us through the conclusion of this existence to the next one with God. The body that stands before you in this pulpit this morning is only a vehicle to encase and protect the soul inside it during this earthly experience and journey. It will some day meet the fate of all used material goods and return to the materials from whence it was created. But I will live in on, and not just in the memories of those who either embraced or despised me. And there in is the fertile soil for that kernel of faith to grow.

Of course, doubt is associated with God. Is God real? Does God exist? Will God be there for me? And no matter how many times God is gracious to answer our prayers and bless our lives, still there is that crack in our faith through which doubt crawls sewing its seeds which lead to hopelessness.

But faith is about hope and love. Faith is about a God whose hand is outstretched to you, just as you fear you will perish. Choose doubt and you will be the victim of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Choose faith, and you will find life and live life abundantly. This reminds me of the passage in Deuteronomy 30:19: *“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”* I put the choice before you, God said: choose life. What does it mean to choose life? Anxiety and fear and sickness unto death, the philosopher Kierkegaard wrote long ago. To choose to dwell in fear or peril can help protect you, but it will ultimately not sustain life, but rather, eat away at the lining of your stomach.

Do we really want to escape death? Is it really better to be trapped underground in a bunker when the rest of the world up above is scorched and riddled with radiation? Last week this was brought home to me when I talked with a young woman about the cancer that was destroying her body. She had just chosen to decline treatments. She said to me, that even if the treatments would prolong her life, she couldn't see the point in it, because her bone cancer would never allow her to get out of bed again, or sit in a wheel chair, or even hold out the possibility of going home. She came to terms with the fact that maybe death is not the worst thing to fear, and that her faith might just bring her through this to a brighter side and conclusion. Now she had some real reasons to doubt and have anxiety, but her faith was stronger and conquered them. She is truly a courageous woman and her faith enables this courage!

Prepare to die is the way of this world. God's way is to prepare to live: Let go of your doubts and fears and Let God! Jesus says to Peter and to us: *"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*  
AMEN