



Pastor Gwen's Message
11th Sunday after Pentecost
"God is not Dead"
Sunday, August 13, 2023

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This wonderful story from Matthew tells us of Jesus' miracle of water walking. This summer we have had a concentration of parables by Jesus but this morning we have another miracle. St Augustine once said that this story was an allegory for Jesus and the church. He felt that the church was represented by the boat the disciples were in. Maybe that is why we call the part of our worship space the "nave". The first church I belonged to, began as a house church. It was the actual pastor's home where Sunday school was in the basement and the adults worshiped in his living room. After a few years we built a small church a few miles away in a farmer's field. I can remember when we moved into our new space. We were all given a tour of the new sanctuary. Everything in it seemed as though it had some meaning, including the ceiling. It looked very much like the upside-down hull of a boat. A cool analogy for the church, as it would be able to weather any storm as long as Jesus was its focus. But I think that there is more to learn from this story than what the bottom of a boat can provide.

There is, in fact, another point in the story that I would like to look at this morning and it is how Jesus deals with Peter, good old impetuous Peter and what Jesus says to the disciples. First off, I would like to say that I never thought about this before, but the disciples did not appear to be afraid of the storm. They were familiar with storms on this lake as they had experienced them before. Their fear begins only when they see Jesus, walking toward them on the water. It was early in the morning and most likely there were groggy when they see what they think is a ghost walking toward them. This image is what we are told they fear, not the battering of the waves. And so, Jesus announces himself by saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." In those few words of Jesus, we hear our lesson for today. Matthew has

recorded for us the clear message that we do not need to be afraid as we go through the storms of life because He is with us. Jesus is the power of God to help and save us.

Folks, we have an amazing God that does not leave us tossing about in the storms of life, physical, mental, or spiritual. He can calm our fears in any situation. We only need to trust and believe that fact, a fact shown in our miracle today.

Peter asks Jesus to command him to get out of the boat on the water and come to him. Jesus is more than happy to use this request as a teaching moment. Peter believes in Jesus and is not afraid. He steps out of the boat and begins to walk toward Jesus at his command. Peter trusts and is well aware that he needs Jesus' help to do such a thing. But Peter's humanness takes over and he notices the strong wind. Fear mounts in him and being frightened, he starts to sink. Jesus reaches out and catches him, now aware more than ever that he could not walk on water without Jesus, he acquiesces and accepts Jesus' help to save him. Notice that Peter knows exactly who to call to save him, Jesus, not his friends in the boat.

Today, I think that too many people do not understand that God is not far away. God has not gone anywhere. In fact, I think today there are religions that continue to teach that in order to reach God only their actions and works will bring them closer to Him. And we all know that that sort of ideal will never work. In Luther's Small Catechism, in the explanation of the third article of the Apostle's Creed, he says, "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." So not only can we not climb a ladder or build a tower to reach God, but we do not need too. God is never far away. He is with us if we only believe. God even is around when we like Peter, relying on our own human instincts. Having just a little faith, Jesus still comes to us to lift us out of trouble, save us and walk with us.

I have heard it said that Jesus did not perform this or any of his miracles, but rather that there was a logical explanation for them all. He walked on stones or on a sandbar to skip across the lake. Our miracle of the feeding of the 5000 can be explained by some saying that most people would have carried food with them, and they ate what they brought and did not need the meager offerings of Jesus. Some people even want these events cut right out of Scripture. Remember that the miracles of Jesus are not magic. David Copperfield would be glad to hear that so if someone asked him to duplicate Jesus' tricks, he would not have to explain why he could not. I also, don't think that Jesus did these miracles to impress people. They were simply done out of compassion and love for the people that received the benefits. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, stilled the waters all to help people. These miracles prove to me what an awesome God we have. He is not far off. He has not abandoned us. He is not gone, but rather continues to love us, his children each and every day.

Our churches as well as our lives can often feel like they are being tossed and turned about by the waves of life. There are many rough patches that we encounter right here in 2023. I am seeing it for the two churches in Draper and Winter I am serving. They are experiencing a rough time right now and God has put it in my heart to help as much as I am able. Most of all, they need to believe that God is walking with them in this troubled time of discernment. And we cannot fail to keep that promise close to our hearts. The last verse in

Matthew's Gospel, as Jesus commissions the disciples, says, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." We cannot fail to remember that promise. God is still with us. We need to listen to his words, "Take heart, do not be afraid." And like the disciples that have gone before us, we can believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and our Lord and Savior.

On April 8, 1966, Time magazine had a cover that had for the first time no picture only three words, Is God Dead? Some of you might recall hearing about this article as it created quite a stir. One little magazine, three-word cover, selling for 35 cents, this lead article in Time had everyone talking about God. Personally, I think that is a good thing, but many a heated discussion ensued. It was considered the most controversial issue in the magazines 75-year history. You can read the article online by googling Time magazine, Is God Dead?

Before that magazine article was published, Dag Hammarskjold published his journal call *Markings*, which was a discussion with himself and with God. He wrote, "God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in Him. But we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason."

AMEN

So, you see, God is not gone. He is very present walking with us day after day. We may not always hear his words, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

Somedays we may not even realize He is holding our hand or drawing us close. But He has not abandoned us and is never far off. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." He will always be near and ready to help and save us. God is not dead!