

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 6 & 7, 2011

Matthew 14:22-33

“Walking on Water”

This is Pr. Joeckel’s first weekend among us as our new senior pastor. And, in his honor, I’d like to tell this joke – a joke you may have heard me tell before. It’s about a man who was asked to describe the ideal parish pastor. He said, “Well, he must be young enough to have the energy to work 24/7 but not too young lest the members of the parish think he’s just a kid. He must be about 30 years old with approximately 50 years of parish experience. He must be married to give the air of a stable, settled man, but he can’t devote any time to his family as he is to be on call to the parish day and night. He must be handsome but not too handsome with a winning personality. He must be perfect in every way but not too perfect lest he offend one of the members of the parish with his perfection. In short, it would be helpful if he could walk on water!”

Now, that’s a joke but there have been times in my ministry and I’m sure in the ministry of other pastors when it seemed all too serious – especially the part about walking on water. Most people aren’t too concerned about walking on water these days, most people are concerned about just keeping their heads above water. And even that’s tough. I’m not just talking about the homeless or the hungry or the poor, I’m also talking about the depressed and the fearful and those caught up in the vicious cycle of drugs and alcohol or who are enslaved to a way of life that, in the end, will only lead to their destruction.

In the play, “A Place Without Doors”, the story is told about a woman who made so many mistakes in her life and had done so many wrong things with her life that she felt that life had closed in on her, leaving her no room, and imprisoned in her own experience. She felt as if she were trapped in a place without doors.

I’ve been a pastor for over 38 years and the longer I’m in the ministry the more I see lives that can be characterized in the same way – people trapped in a place without doors by their own fears, failures and frustrations. And not just that but their unrealized dreams, unfulfilled hopes, poor health, family trouble, tensions with jobs, insecurities, inadequate finances or conflict with others as well. These and a lot of other things make many people feel trapped – like they can’t even keep their heads above water any more – like they’re sinking.

A nationally-known TV preacher once suggested a way out to people who felt that way. He suggested a six-step program. And here are the steps. First, remember who you are. Second, think positively. Third, try to think of your problem as an external condition. Fourth, do what you can. Fifth, develop a sense of humor. And sixth, keep a winning image. With all due respect, while all of this may sound good, this kind of advice is of no practical value to the one who is sinking. I mean, think if Jesus gave this kind of advice to Peter as he sinks into the waters

of the sea of Galilee. I can just hear him now, “Pete – just remember who you are. Think positively. Think of the potential of your drowning as an external condition. Do what you can. Keep a sense of humor about it all and, even though you’re drowning, keep a winning image.” I mean, come on!

The account of Jesus coming to his disciples on the waters of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a 3:00 a.m. storm offers us something quite different. You see, Jesus came to them, not with advice, but with himself. He came to save them and save them he did.

Now, there are times in our lives when we may feel a lot like those first disciples. We believe in Jesus too but sometimes we seem to be alone and the wind and the waves have turned against us and the boat of our lives seems ready to capsize. We may struggle on our own to keep our heads above water but nothing seems to help. It’s at that point that we, like those first disciples, are reminded through Word and Sacrament that we’re not alone – that Jesus is with us. And it’s at that point of Word and Sacrament that Jesus comes to us to save us. His voice calls to us to not be afraid and with that He begins to calm the troubled waters of our lives through his presence in them.

Now I don’t mean that Jesus is the “great band-aid of life” as some have suggested or that he comes in some general, nondescript way to all people who are in trouble and provides a miraculous means of escape. But I do mean that Jesus is a very real person with whom those who believe and trust in him can have a very real relationship. And I do mean that he has already met our deepest need through the waters of baptism and that he continues to seek to meet us and strengthen us in His body and blood in the fellowship of His church by grace through faith even today.

Make no mistake about it – Jesus is more than an advice-giver – he’s more than just a mysterious force that calms the troubled seas of life by magic. He’s real and he lives today and he seeks to meet us all in the real places of our need through Word and Sacrament and through the mutual consolation and encouragement of the fellowship of believers.

If we will but recognize not only our need but also his great love – if we will come to him as he comes to us, trusting that he will save us both for this life and for the life to come – he will. Oh, it may not be in our time and on our terms, but he will save us according to his time and his terms. Of that we can be sure. We may get our feet wet but we will never drown when we turn to Jesus in faith.

You see, no one needs to be able to walk on water – no pastor, no parishioner. It was and still is good enough that Jesus walks on water and that he walks on it to people like you and me today. In his name. Amen.