



Sermon of August 8, 1999



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"No Fear"

Matthew 14:22-23

Marcia and I decided to take a one week vacation trip to Hawaii. Just before our trip, I received in the mail a piece of correspondence which got my attention immediately. The envelope read: Traffic Violation Citation. I even thought it was sent to the wrong name by mistake. When I opened the envelope, I discovered a photo of myself driving my red Honda and smiling. On the bottom of such a nice photo there was documentation of my crossing the signal light on the red light and still smiling as I was talking to my wife.

A few days later, after my arrival from this short vacation, I found another piece of correspondence in which the bail had been set for my traffic violation in the amount of \$300.00. What a costly photo and what a silly surprise after vacation. In the last correspondence there was a note saying: If you fail to pay this bail on the above mentioned date a notice will be placed for your arrest. I can just imagine Mark Trotter bailing me out of jail and the Bishop asking me for my Orders back on the account of such a terrible ticket.

Today's Gospel calls our attention to the subject of Fear. As I read the Gospel lesson, I find three important dimensions related to the life and ministry of Jesus.

First, Jesus is moved by compassion for the crowd who has been around him. Here is what the text says: "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed the sick." V.14

That is Jesus' true nature: "Compassion for the hungry." The ability to identify Himself with

those in need. Jesus coming to the rescue of those who find themselves in crisis.

The response of His disciples was a very simple one: "...send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." The disciples had a simple solution to a complex problem. The Church still makes the same mistake. We try to solve big problems with simple answers. Jesus' response to this rather cruel request from His disciples was: "They do not need to go away." "You give them something to eat."

The first miracle of the entire passage takes place when five loaves of bread and two fish are to satisfy an estimated crowd of five thousand men, women and children.

Compassion is indeed an integrant ingredient of Jesus' nature in reaching out to those around Him, and meeting one of their most crucial needs: Food. We can think of real food for the body and food for the soul. The greatest of all hungers is indeed the hunger of the human spirit. And this is not a new phenomenon in human beings for David already included this in his collection of Psalms - "My soul is thirsty for God." "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul thirsts for God, for the living God." "When can I go and meet with God?" Psalm 42:1,2.

Secondly, the interesting lesson here is Jesus' retreating Himself away from the crowd, seeking a lonely place and a special moment of silence to be in prayer; Jesus' deep relationship with the source of Power; with the source of His authority: God, the Father.

It is dark already, it has been a long day for the crowd, for the disciples and for Jesus—He wanted to be left alone in communion with the Father, in prayer by Himself. A special time, a lonely place, a time for prayer. A time to recharge His own spirit. Do you feel at times the need to be left alone? Have you experienced those special moments of solitude when your soul is in great need to enter in direct contact with God? Those are precious moments of solitude and contemplation, silent mediation.

Thirdly, the boat was already at a considerable distance from the shore when Jesus went out to meet His disciples in the boat. He does so by "walking on the lake." Here the disciples get terrified. "It is a ghost," they cried out of fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, "take courage." "It is I." "Don't be afraid."

Fear is indeed one of the most common ingredients of the human personality. Fear is for the most part a rational expression of a self-conscious mind. The Bible speaks of so many events when we find men and women in fear before God. In all cases, God's answer is the same: "Fear not, for I am with You." That was the last promise Jesus made before ascending to God: "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Matt.28:20

It is here that the second miracle takes place—Jesus walking over the waters. "Lord, it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come" he said.

I think our tendency when we read this story is to identify ourselves with Peter. Peter was daring and courageous. He was a risk taker. No hesitation, no discourse, no ifs. Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was

afraid and as he began to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me." Peter had a glimpse of reality. He became self-conscious of the situation he was in, and panicked. I think we can see ourselves in this picture. What can we make out of that? Of course, we can always over simplify the story by concluding that if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we'll be OK. We can easily preach to others: "Jesus stills the storms of our lives." There is no need to be afraid. Therefore, trust in Jesus and you will make it to the other shore safely. But wait a minute, could it be that we are looking at the story from the wrong angle? Are we saying that: "If one can trust in Jesus he or she will never fall?" One of the strong considerations I would like to submit to you is the fact that the text is not about Peter's faith but about a strong statement of faith in the person of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The whole text centers not on the two miracles but rather on the confession of faith made by those disciples." "Truly you are the Son of God." V.33

The epistle lesson is in direct harmony with the Gospel: "Anyone who calls the name of the Lord will be saved." Rom. 10:13 In fact, this is the first of three confessions about the messianic nature of Jesus. One was right after Peter has been rescued; the second at the Mount of Transfiguration; and the third one was made by Peter when Jesus ask His disciples about their own understand of who Jesus was: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. 16:16 Interestingly enough, this confession of faith was made by Peter. So the story is about this statement of faith.

The story here is also about the authority of Jesus. Matthew recognizes the power of Jesus. Jesus sends His disciples away; Jesus dismisses the crowd; He exercises authority over the elements of nature; Power of the water and wind. The story here is a Theophany in which Jesus boldly reveals His divine nature and His closer relationship to God. He is the Incarnation of God. Here is a self disclosure of who God really is. The Gospel writers draw from the sources: Job. 9:8 "He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea." Psalm 107:23-32; Isaiah 41:4-10; 43:24.

As a matter of fact, I would like for you to take home an assignment. That is to read Isaiah 41:10. Please write it down in your bulletin and read it to yourself; make it your prayer for the week ahead.

A word about the disciples: They were faithful and obedient. They did what Jesus asked them to do. "Get in the boat and stay put."

We cannot negate their right to be fearful as they saw this ghost like image walking towards them in the dark; this was simply a natural reaction; the disciples were human beings.

Miracles can be a terrifying experience in life. How would you react towards a radical miracle today?

Here comes the Messiah graciously to meet His disciples wherever they are. Jesus walking on the waters was simply an affirmation of His identity with God, the Creator, who finds Himself "moving on the face of waters." Gen. 1:2

The miracle here is simply teaching us the lesson that whether swimming or sinking that is up to you and me. It depends on how much faith we have. Faith in the power of God, faith in

ourselves.

What about our capacity to stay focused without looking at the winds or even thinking about the depth of the water. The lesson here is that our Lord will never abandon His children. "Not even in the most fearful circumstances of our lives." He is always there saying to us, "Come, take heart, it is I, have no fear." Today He is inviting you to come and meet Him and make a place in your heart for Him. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Matt. 11:28

The conclusion of this story is to be found on V.33, Then those who were in the boat worshiped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." But the story does not end there. The story of Jesus does not end with His crucifixion, or the ascension. The disciples were waiting for the next chapter in the last verses of Matthew. And so are we. The story has not reached its culmination. In the book of Revelations 21:1 in John's version of the new earth and new heaven, the "sea is no more." The torments of life the turbulent storms of our existence will be calmed by the creator, by our "Lord Jesus Christ who is the beginning of Creation, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last." Unto Whom be all the glory and praise today and ever. Amen

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, the waters are deep and cold; the depth of the sea is frightening. We need your hand to sustain us in times of trouble, in moments of fear and despair. Let us hear your invitation saying to us—Come, do not fear it is I. In our moments of darkness let us see your light. In moments of solitude let us feel your companionship. In the name of the living Christ, we pray. Amen.

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