

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ninth Sunday After Trinity, August 1, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 394 (244:1) 437, 649, 644

Lessons: 1 Kings 19:9b-18; 1 Corinthians 3:1-11; John 4:15-26

Sermon Text: Matthew 14:22-33

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ:

In this sinful world we find many doubters. Even though we have the natural revelation of God in the creation of the universe, and even though we have God's written revelation in his Word, there yet are many doubters. There are those who doubt there is a God because they cannot see him with their physical eyes. There are those who doubt that God created all things because that creation is so contrary to all human reason and understanding. Some doubt because they think their sins are too great and too numerous. Some doubt because they have for so long refused the Gospel. Some doubt anything and everything that the Bible teaches when they cannot explain it in words of human wisdom and understanding. Would any of us say there has not been some moment of doubt in our lives?

The words of our text should teach us to cast aside all doubting and put our whole trust in Jesus. Let us, then, with the Holy Spirit's guidance, meditate on the words of the Christian poet:

"I AM TRUSTING THEE, LORD JESUS, TRUSTING ONLY THEE."

- 1. We are in a world filled with fear and anxiety;**
- 2. There are no valid reasons for us to doubt;**
- 3. Jesus gives us abundant reasons to trust in him.**

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd." Jesus had just performed the miracle of feeding the more than five thousand people with a few loaves and some fish. After the miracle the multitude reacted in a way that was very displeasing to Jesus. They wanted to make him their earthly king because he could provide for their material needs so bountifully and easily. Though the disciples were not very eager to leave, Jesus commanded them to get into a ship and cross over to the western side of the Sea of Galilee. He wanted to dismiss the people and then go ***"up on a mountainside by himself to pray."*** Jesus did not want his disciples to get any false ideas about the kingdom of God. It is not an earthly kingdom. Jesus told Pontius Pilate: ***"My kingdom is not of this world,"*** John 18:36. The kingdom of God is God's rule in the interest of his Church. It is established by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament.

After dismissing the people Jesus spent much of the night alone in prayer. ***"After he had dismissed them, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone."*** Here we have a fine example to follow. In the midst of his tiring and distracting work, Jesus found time for prayer to his heavenly Father. As a true man in the state of humiliation, Jesus felt the need of comfort and strength from above. How much more should we who are mere creatures of God seek help and strength for the tasks of our daily life through prayer! How much easier our work would be and how much more easily our problems could be solved if only we spent more time in prayer!

Meanwhile our text tells us how the disciples were getting along: ***"The boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."*** If it were not for the violent storm, they would have already reached their destination. But they had only gone about half way across the lake and

could make no headway. In addition their strength was nearly exhausted. But, then Jesus came to help them. ***“During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.”*** Between 3 and 6 AM Jesus came to his disciples. Miraculously he walked on the water. With his omnipotent power Jesus caused the water to bear his weight and prevented the wind and waves from disturbing him. But the disciples did not recognize Jesus in their terror and in the darkness. They gave way to their superstitious fears and believed that they had seen a ghost. They screamed aloud in terror.

The disciples in a storm-tossed boat in the darkness of the night shows us a picture of ourselves in this world. In this world we are often like the frightened disciples, filled with anxiety and fear. When God unleashes the powers of nature in storms, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, horrible fires, tornadoes, and other disasters, people are filled with fear. When sinners learn of God’s wrath because of sin, they are afraid like the jailer at Philippi when Paul and Silas and the other prisoners were miraculously released from the prison. He feared that all the prisoners had escaped and he was ready to kill himself. Often in weakness of faith our hearts are filled with fear over many lesser things in life. In time of sickness we tend to be fearful and forget that God in his love is chastening us for our spiritual welfare.

If we give way to fear and anxiety we will be led to doubt God’s providence, grace and mercy. That doubting is the devil’s delight, for that is what he wants us to do. We learn from our text that **there are no valid reasons for us to doubt.**

2.

In their fear and terror Jesus came to the disciples immediately and said: ***“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*** With a calm voice Jesus assured the disciples that they had no reason to fear. He urged them to take courage. Peter was filled with courage at the sound of Jesus’ voice. We remember Peter as being an impetuous man, often acting quicker than he thought. But, it was true faith that prompted him to ask the Lord to make him walk on the water. So Jesus commanded him to come, and as long as Peter trusted that the Lord could help him do this, all was well. By the almighty power of Jesus Peter did walk on the water. But, then his faith began to waver and he no longer trusted in Jesus to help him. When he looked at the waves and saw how high the wind was, he began to sink and cried out to the Lord to save him.

Jesus, being patient and kind, quickly caught Peter by the arm and saved him. ***“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’”*** We ask: Was there any valid reason for Peter to doubt? Surely not! So also there are never any valid reasons for us to doubt. Let us ask ourselves a few questions to make this fact crystal clear. Has God ever broken any promises made in his holy Word? Consider the main promise of sending a Savior. Was it not fulfilled? Is not Jesus the true Son of God Almighty? The Bible says: ***“With God all things are possible,”*** Matt. 19:26. The angel told Mary when he announced that she as a virgin would bear a child: ***“Nothing is impossible with God,”*** Luke 1:37. Has God’s grace in Christ been abolished? No, the promises of grace and forgiveness in Christ still stand and will remain to all eternity. Does God ever withdraw his gracious presence from us? No. Christ has promised: ***“Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age,”*** Matt. 28:20. Has the Holy Spirit ceased his work in our hearts through the Gospel? All of these questions must be answered with a firm no according to God’s holy Word. Therefore, there are never any valid reasons for us to doubt. Whenever we doubt that, let us use God’s Word and search out all the comforting promises and truths. Then our hearts will be comforted and our faith strengthened.

So also in our text **Jesus gives us abundant reasons to trust in him.**

3.

Our text tells us how Jesus saved Peter from sinking when the faith of Peter wavered and faltered. Surely Peter learned from that incident to put his trust in Jesus, and the other disciples likewise. ***“When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”*** The disciples had been very frightened by the strong wind and the waves that threatened to sink their little boat. Then Jesus proved once again that he is the supreme Lord over the elements, the Ruler of wind and wave. As soon as Jesus and Peter came into the boat the wind ceased. Not gradually, but there was a sudden

calm. When the Lord willed that it be quiet, it immediately was so. The psalmist writes: ***“Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven,”*** Ps. 107:29-30. When the disciples witnessed this wonderful miracle, their faith in Jesus as the Son of God was all the more greatly strengthened. They reverently worshiped their Master who again showed himself to be true God. We also should say with Peter: ***“We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God,”*** John 6:69.

The main thing that we should learn from this miracle is to trust in Jesus. In all of Scripture, if there were only this one incident, that would be enough to cause us to put our whole trust in Jesus. However, the Bible is filled with facts to teach us to trust in Jesus. He healed many sick people; he raised people from the dead. He miraculously fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and some fish. But the most important thing of all is that he is our Savior who redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. All our sins are paid for with the suffering and death of Jesus. Because of his work of redeeming us, God the Father declares us to be righteous. By rising from the dead, Jesus proved that the Father accepted his redemption. And having ascended into heaven to rule over all things, and especially to be the Head of his Church on earth, he lives and reigns to all eternity. He has promised that on the Last Day he will raise all the dead, and take all who believe in him to be with him forever in heaven.

So, in all time of need, whatever problem we have, whenever we are sick, or frustrated and filled with anxiety, let us remember God’s promise: ***“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand,”*** Is. 41:10. The Lord wants us to trust in him with all our heart, believing the promises he makes in his Word. Thus, may the words of the Christian poet ever be our song of faith:

*“I am trusting, Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free.” Amen.*
(The Lutheran Hymnal 428:1)

Edited from a Ministry By Mail sermon for 4th Sunday after Epiphany, February 2, 2003.