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8th Sunday after Pentecost  
Sermons  
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## MATTHEW 14:22-33 - "BEYOND PHYSICS"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Our text today, Matthew 14:22-33, clearly displays the awesome power of God in Jesus. Jesus walks on the waters of the sea, not some frozen lake in the midst of a Wisconsin winter, but on the Sea of Galilee in a warm climate. Normally when human beings attempt to walk upon water that is not frozen, unsurprisingly they immediately sink. Simple physics demonstrates and explains that people do not have the ability to walk on water just as we lack the ability to walk on air. It is not in our created nature as human beings to do either thing. Yet the human man, Jesus of Nazareth, did what is physically impossible for human beings. Jesus walked on water; He did that which is beyond physics. Jesus did what only God has the power to do.

This is hardly the only text in Matthew's Gospel that displays the awesome power of God in Jesus. Just last week we heard how Jesus fed five thousand plus people with two fish and five loaves of bread, that all ate and all were satisfied. Previously Jesus healed and restored many people who were physically sick, diseased, and deformed. Jesus restored a man's withered hand; He gave speech to a mute, sight to men born blind, made paralytics able to walk, cast out demons, and He even restored a dead girl back to life. In all these instances Jesus acted beyond physics to heal and restore other humans bound by the laws of physics. These acts of Jesus which defy the laws of physics all testify that Jesus is not mere man. Jesus is human, but beyond human; Jesus is true man, and He is true God. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, in the flesh.

St. Matthew wants the readers and hearers of his Gospel to believe with confidence that the reign of God has come in Jesus of Nazareth to heal and restore creation. Matthew recorded all these great acts of Jesus, including the events recorded in our text today, to proclaim Jesus' identity as the Son of God in the flesh come to save people from their sins. Matthew wants you to believe and confess that truly Jesus is the Son of God. Many readers and hearers of the Gospel of Matthew sadly seem to miss this when considering our text. Instead of focusing upon Jesus, many shift to focusing in upon Peter. Many want to use Peter as an example of the kind of faith Christians should have; books have even been written that use the bold actions of Peter for how you can find meaning and purpose in life, "Get Out The Boat: Discover The Meaning Of Your Life" by Thomas Winninger and "If You Want To Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out Of The Boat" by John Ortberg are two such examples.

A careful reading and hearing of the text prevents anyone from extolling Peter or any of the other disciples at this point as good examples of faith and faithfulness to

follow. There can be no praise for Peter or any of Jesus' disciples here, quite the opposite. There is only praise for Jesus who powerfully and graciously reveals Himself and acts to save His disciples.

Let us now carefully consider this somewhat familiar text in sections:

22 And immediately He compelled the disciples to get into the boat and begin to go ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. 23 And after He dismissed the crowds He went up onto the mountain and by Himself He prayed. And when it had become late, He alone was there. 24 But the boat was already many stades distance from the land, even though it was being beaten by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

Matthew sets the scene by telling us that Jesus commanded His disciples to leave and go ahead of Him by boat just after the vast five thousand plus crowd ate and were all satisfied from five loaves and two fish. Jesus sends the disciples off, then He dismisses the vast crowd, and finally He goes to the mountain by Himself to pray. Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus is alone praying for some time and that His disciples have made considerable head way in the boat upon the sea. The disciples are apart from Jesus, a distance and a sea separates them. The wind is blowing and there are waves, but the disciples are not at all troubled by this. There is no great storm upon the sea that causes them to be afraid as there was a previous time when Jesus was with His disciples in a boat sleeping; that time they thought they would die, but this time without Jesus they are doing swell. Things take a turn for the worse only when Jesus comes to them.

25 And at the fourth watch of the night He came toward them by walking upon the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking upon the sea they were troubled saying that, "It is a ghost," and from fear they cried out. 27 And immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, "Be courageous, it is I; Stop being afraid."

Jesus finished His time of prayer and walked out to His disciples some time between 3:00 am and 6:00 am. Jesus walked up the sea for many stades of distance and was able to catch up to the disciples, remember the wind was against them. It is the sight of Jesus walking on the water towards them that causes the disciples to be troubled and afraid! We most likely would have had a similar reaction, after all it is not normal for a man to walk upon water. The disciples saw Jesus walking on the water and only then were they troubled. They said that Jesus must be a ghost and then they cried out in fear, no doubt thinking this ghost had come to do them harm.

The disciples were troubled and fearful in the presence of the Lord Jesus, in the this awesome display of God's power. However, Jesus did not leave His disciples to their trouble and fear. Jesus immediately acted to save them through His Word- "Be courageous, it is I; Stop being afraid." Jesus' Word should have been enough to calm them, to give them peace, and to reassure them that it was Him just as His Word had many times before. But for Peter at least Jesus' Word was not enough; he demanded more.

28 But Peter answered and said to Him, "Lord if it is You, then command me to come to You upon the waters." 29 And He said, "Come."

Peter did not act in bold faith trusting in Jesus. Peter acted in doubt and put the Lord to the test, the very thing which *Deuteronomy 6:16*, “*You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah,*” forbids. Peter was acting the skeptic, the doubter. He wanted more than Jesus’ Word; he demanded that Jesus further demonstrate His power to him. Peter refused to believe Jesus’ Word. Peter was acting as Peter often did, impetuously with his own agenda. There is no room to praise Peter and his actions here! We would do well to not act like Peter, yet too often we act just like him.

Jesus is to be praised! Jesus exercises such loving patience and understanding with Peter. Jesus does not need to further prove Himself to Peter, what He has given is sufficient. Jesus could have said, “Peter, I told you it is Me; relax and be quite, I am coming aboard,” but in this case Jesus graciously invites Peter to come to Him.

And when he had gotten down from the boat Peter walked upon the waters and came to Jesus. 30 But when he looked at the waves, that they were strong, he was afraid, and as he began to sink he cried out saying, “Lord, save me.” 31 But immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and He took hold of him and He said to him, “Little-faith, why did you doubt?”

By Jesus’ gracious and powerful Word the impossible happens; Peter, simple, skeptical, and sinful man also walks on water! Jesus’ Word of invitation, “Come,” moves Peter beyond the laws of physics to walk upon the waters of the sea right up to Jesus. Peter is walking and standing right before Jesus upon the water, how amazing! How great and powerful is the Word of Jesus! How poor and pathetic is Peter.

Peter takes his eyes away from Jesus and looks at the wind moving the waves. Peter becomes afraid. Peter begins to sink into the sea. Now Peter cries out “Lord, save me.” Peter has gotten himself into trouble way over his head by putting Jesus to the test. Poor Peter cannot save himself, so he cries “Lord, save me.” Mercifully and graciously Jesus immediately responds to the need of Peter. Jesus’ hand is there to grab hold of Peter and prevent him from drowning. Jesus saves Peter. Jesus saves Peter and then He rebukes him for his doubts. Jesus doesn’t say that Peter has no faith; He rebukes Peter as having little faith and doubting His Word. In spite of Peter’s doubts and testing, Jesus graciously saves Peter and takes him back to the boat.

32 And when they went up into the boat the wind stopped. 33 And they worshiped Him in the boat saying, “Truly You are the Son of God!”

Back in the boat, now with the Lord Jesus near to them and with them the wind ceases and all are safe and sound. The disciples are moved by the events they just witnessed to worship and confess Jesus as one who is beyond a mere man, as one who is God. Who else could Jesus be? Who else but the Son of God could walk on the waters of the sea, calm the fears of His disciples by His Word, and graciously save their foolish brother? The disciples finally got it right that day, Jesus of Nazareth, is true man and true God. They properly confessed Jesus and worshiped Him as the Son of God.

You and I have never witnessed Jesus walking to us upon water, but Jesus has come to us through water. Once you were far off from Jesus in your sins, but now through the water and Word of Baptism Jesus has drawn close to you, to comfort and to save you. Throughout the Scriptures God has used water to kill and to make alive; to bring His judgment against sin and to save life. In the great Flood, God destroyed the earth through water because of the sinfulness and wickedness of humanity, but He saved Noah and company upon the ark. In the Exodus, God drowned the armies of hard hearted Pharaoh, but saved His people by bringing them through walls of water on dry ground. In Baptism we die and rise with Jesus, the Son of God who died for our sins and rose to give us life.

Jesus, true man and true God not only walked upon the waters, but He walked to the cross. He walked to the cross to save His people from their sins. The Son of God whom the disciples confessed in the boat died as the ransom for the many, for your sins and for mine. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, God who died for us, God who roes and comes to make us new.

You sinners, who are troubled, fearful, and full of doubts, all you "little-faiths" be encouraged by the Word of Jesus you hear this day; be encouraged by the promise He made to you in Baptism. Jesus did not leave His disciples troubled, fearful, and crying out in the boat, but He acted to save them through the encouragement of His Word. Jesus did not leave Peter in doubt and fear to drown in the sea, but He grabbed hold of him and saved him. Be assured that in the midst of your guilt, fear, trouble, and doubts that the Son of God who walked upon the water also walked to the cross to save you. Jesus will save you for the resurrection and eternal life; this is His Word and promise to you in Baptism. Jesus, truly You are the Son of God, amen!