**Year A – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 14:22-33**

**August 27, 2017**

**Be Still, and Know that I Am God!**

1. **I won’t let the storms of life drown you**
2. **I won’t let go of your hand**

Introduction

Years ago, a young mother was making her way across the hills of South Wales, carrying her tiny baby in her arms, when she was overtaken by a blinding blizzard. She never reached her destination and when the blizzard had subsided her body was found by searchers beneath a mound of snow.

But they discovered that before her death, she had taken off all her outer clothing and wrapped it about her baby. When they unwrapped the child, to their great surprise and joy, they found he was alive and well. She had mounded her body over his and given her life for her child, proving the depths of this mother’s love for her child.

Years later that child, David Lloyd George, grown to manhood, became prime minister of Great Britain, and without a doubt, one of England’s greatest statesmen.

What incredible love. A mother gave her life for her child so he could survive and do great things.

Well today we will behold the incredible love of God. A God who completely gave his whole life for his people. A God who will never let us fall, even during the storms of life. A God who pulls us through it all to eternal glory. A God who gives us the great things of heaven.

Setting the Scene

Jesus here is getting toward the end of his ministry, and both his popularity and the opposition against him are growing. John the Baptist had just been beheaded, and Jesus grieved his death. He wanted to withdraw for a while so he could contemplate the loss of his dear friend. But the masses followed. Forced to feed them, he performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000.

You would think that would be enough to make the disciples believe that he was the Christ, the all-powerful son of God. But Mark tells us, “They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.” Even after all these miracles and teachings, they still didn’t understand.

The last words of John the Baptist that are recorded are him asking Jesus the question, “Are you the Christ, or should we look for someone else?” Well, here Jesus will give them the full proof that he is the Christ.

Part 1: I won’t let the storms of life drown you

We pick it up in verse 22, “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.” Again this is right after he fed the 5,000. Jesus isn’t trying to escape the crowd here because he doesn’t love them, but he knows that they want to make him a king by force, as John says in his account of this.

And what a huge temptation that was for Jesus! Live a tough life full of rejection and be brutally crucified for the sins of the world, or have people glorify you, make you king, and bow down to you! Satan is working hard again here on Jesus, and Jesus wants nothing to do with the temptation. So he dismisses the crowd.

Verse 23, “After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.” Jesus goes away to pray. No doubt one of his prayers was for the safety of his disciples, and possibly another one for his own strength to overcome these strong temptations.

Verse 24, “But the boat was already a considerable distance from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.” So the disciples had been in this boat all evening and through the night! The fourth watch was the period between 3-6 am! They had been struggling against the storm this whole time, and Jesus walks out to them, perhaps as much as 3 ½ miles onto the lake, toward them. You can imagine their surprise, and considering how exhausted they were, their reaction is pretty predictable.

Verse 26, “When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’” So Jesus here uses the same word that God used when he was talking to Moses through the burning bush. It is I. I am. When talking to Moses he said, “I AM WHO I AM.” Moses had been scared, worried that he didn’t have the gifts to approach Pharaoh, and God calmed him down with these words, “I AM WHO I AM.” I always have been, always will be, and will never stop guiding and protecting you.

And Peter knows it. He speaks up immediately, trusting that Jesus can do anything to save him, and says, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’”

Peter was always the impetuous one, wasn’t he? He sees Jesus walking on top of the sea. His feet aren’t sinking, and the waves are not hurting him. Amazing. And he believes it’s Jesus, but he just wants that little bit of reaffirmation. So, full of faith, he walks on the water too. But then he sees the wind and waves, and thinks he can’t possibly be doing this, walking on the water. He stops trusting, and he sinks.

What are your winds and waves? Oh sure, you will leave here today feeling the love of Christ, seeing his power in this very message you are hearing, and knowing that he helps you and provides for you, and you might even feel like you can walk on water with his help!

But that’s the easy part. When do those winds beat against your face, and when do those waves come to engulf your soul? Is it when you wake up in the morning realizing that your marriage isn’t what it used to be? That love takes work? Is it when everyone around you seems to be against you lately, and everything, one after the next, is hitting you in the face and drowning you? You are stuck under a mountain of work, of stress, of family trouble and of struggling to make ends meet financially. Is it losing that dear loved one?

Have you ever looked at those waves, and those winds, and wanted to give up on your Lord? As if, if he really loved you, if he was really keeping you afloat in your life this long, well he must not anymore! Maybe he’s really not there. Maybe he doesn’t really care about me.

I’ll solve these myself! I’ll create love in my marriage again by demanding it from my spouse, rather than giving it myself. I’ll solve my finances by slashing my giving to the Lord. I’ll become obsessed with “bettering myself”, over and above bettering my relationship with my God through Word and Sacrament! That will solve my problems! As for this God, I don’t know what has happened to him!

But where does that get you? It got Peter on his way to a watery grave. And you’ll find the same thing for you too. You’ll find that demanding love without giving it in marriage only drives you two farther apart. You find that when you slash your giving to God, he slashes his giving to you. You’ll find that obsessing over “bettering” yourself, whether it’s your appearance, or your habits, your job status, or whatever, often helps for awhile and isn’t bad in and of itself, but eventually you are humbled again for putting your trust in yourself. And you sink deeper. And not just that, you slowly swirl down the drain toward rejecting your Savior forever.

Until finally you realize it isn’t you who was stepping over those life problems, and it never was. It was God’s mighty hand guiding you, keeping you from sinking. And Peter realized that before it was too late. He cried out, “Lord, help me!” And Jesus did.

Part 2: I won’t let go of your hand

Verse 31, “Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.” Just in the nick of time, before Peter drowns, Jesus reaches out his hand and catches him. He pulls him up, and looks at him lovingly. He doesn’t want Peter to drown. He wants to give Peter life.

And today he catches you. You who have tried to swim over those waves of life, who have tried to walk on the water by yourself, who in your sinful arrogance have thought that you were in control of your life, today Jesus grabs your hand and says, “Enough! I can’t stand sitting here and watching you drown anymore! You’re my child, and you’re running around trying to solve your problems on your own, and just making bigger messes. Now I’m going to save you and handle it for you!”

And he says, “Watch me. Watch as I take you from drowning in your sins. The guilt of your sins, and you know what they are, they are slapping you in the face right now. And Satan wants to drown you. He wants you to think that there is no way I can love you. That I’m a God who only cares about “good” people. He wants you to think that I hate you, that I have a vendetta against you, that I like to see you in pain.

“But Satan is a liar. He wants to drag you to hell with him. But look, I have defeated him. I crushed his head on Good Friday by making a full payment for your sins. I went down to hell and made a public spectacle of Satan, showing my victory over him. I rose on the third day to completely destroy death for you.

“And now I take you by the hand and pull you out of the ocean of sin that you were drowning in. The ocean that your sinful nature loves, but the ocean that you know eventually kills you. I rescue you from that, and I put you by my side. And, look at your hand. My hand is still in it. I haven’t let go yet. And I never will.

“All those times that you have thought you would drown, my mighty hand led you through. And there will be more waves as long as you are on this earth. But my hand is still there, clutching yours, until I finally take you to the calm, serene, peaceful water of heaven. There I will wipe every single tear from your eyes. And you will dwell in my house. Protected by me. Loved by me. Living in perfect happiness and joy, with me. Forever.

“In the meantime, there will be waves, but I will lead you over them. I will never let you out in that ocean by yourself. I will always. Be there. With you.”

Conclusion

You know, after Jesus grabbed Peter, Peter looked up at the face of the Lord. The rain was pelting against Jesus’ face. He was soaked. The lightning flashed against his face, and he said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Someday, because Jesus came here to pay your price, you will be in heaven. And your heart will be filled with joy and awe in the presence of God. You will never feel safer, you will never experience an ounce of pain, and it will last forever.

Maybe on that day, you’ll look to yourself, and you’ll think, “You of little faith, why did you doubt? Why did you wonder where God was when your short flash-in-the-pan earthly life was going on? Why did you worry and stress when the storms of this short life set in? Why did you ever let an ounce of pain get to you? Your Savior always had your hand, and he never let go. And now you are his for eternity. And then you’ll probably look down at your new heavenly robes, and think, oh well, that’s over! Who cares?! And run back to the heavenly room that Jesus left this world to prepare for you so long ago.

Jesus won’t let go of your hand. Not before, not now, and never for eternity. So let those waves glance off your face without a problem. You don’t care, because you can’t stop smiling and watching as your Savior pulls you through it all. All the way to your eternal rest with him. Your God is good, isn’t he? Amen.