Sermon: “Take Courage! It is I. Don’t Be Afraid!”

Matthew 14:22-33

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. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” 28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” 29 “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

What are you afraid of? As a child your answer may be quite different than an adult. Maybe as a child it was a character from a book, comic or movie. Maybe it is the Joker from Batman, or when I was a child, I was scared of the scary wolf from the Never Ending Story. The things that make us afraid are horrible and find a place in our mind. All of a sudden we are dreaming about these things and having nightmares.

One would have to imagine that the disciples were feeling a bit vulnerable. One of the biggest supporters of Jesus, John the Baptist, was recently beheaded. They could have the same fears that since their message is the same as John the Baptist that maybe their heads were going to be on the chopping block. So as these thoughts are racing through the disciples minds, and as they mix with what they have just seen in Jesus providing a filling meal for the 5,000 plus people on the hillside, Jesus tells them, go ahead of me to the other side of the lake and Jesus told them he would catch up with them later.
As the disciples were readying their boats and beginning to cross the Sea of Galilee, Jesus took time to recharge his batteries as well. Jesus went up to the mountainside and began to pray. Imagine this, the Son of God, and Son of Man retreats to the mountains to pray. Why? Remember, Jesus is true man, he still has feelings, he feels loss, he feels disappointment when someone rejects him, and he cries when he is hurt. So like you or I, when we feel loss and sadness, we pray. Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven and following his prayers he went to meet up with his disciples.

Conventional wisdom would say that Jesus would jump into a boat and meet them on the water, or he would walk around the Sea and meet them at the town where the disciples were going. But Jesus saw an opportunity to teach. So Jesus began on the most direct route between land and the disciples’ boat and sure enough Jesus defies all laws of buoyancy and physics and walks on the water as if it were a sidewalk.

Isn’t it remarkable that Jesus within the span of minutes gives you insight that he is true man and true God? One minute Jesus is in prayer and finding strength from his Father in heaven, then in the next verse Jesus is walking on water.

If this doesn’t give you piece of mind I don’t know what will. First of all Jesus shows you how he is a wonderful resource to go to if you are dealing with the hard things in life. That in the same way we deal with all of the heavy issues of life, we see that Jesus too has dealt with them as well. If we ever doubted that Jesus was who he said he was, we have seen evidence of it in these lessons we have been reading. Defying food, and miraculously producing more, defying physics and walking on water. Jesus is both God and man. He has experienced things that men and women have experienced, but he reassures us that he still is God and is able to do miraculous things.

Now put yourself into the disciple’s shoes again. They again are feeling dejected and vulnerable. They feel kind of scared of things, and maybe a little on edge about things. And then all of a sudden they see something they will never see again. Something so amazing that they couldn’t explain it except by saying there must be a ghost. They see something in the distance resembling something man like but still unsure. So almost bursting into a Superman line the disciples unsure
of what is going on say, “It’s a bird! It’s a plane!, It’s a ghost!,” then Jesus yells out, “Take Courage! It is I! Don’t be afraid.”

In one phrase Jesus, encouraged them, set their fears to rest, and then reassured them to not fear. There would be no better comfort for the disciples if this indeed was Jesus, so Peter, in his normal forward and bold way tells who they think is Jesus, Peter said, “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” 29 “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”

Pretty awesome! Peter as he sees this amazing feat in front of him, he trusted in Jesus with his whole heart, and he stepped outside of the boat, and walked on water, and began walking toward Jesus. One thing is for sure, these are adult men and not children. Just imagine if Peter was 5, and he asked Jesus to walk on water, as soon as everyone in the boats saw that Peter didn’t sink, everyone in those boats would have begun walking on water. I think it’s safe to say that the faith of a child is remarkable, thus Jesus constantly encourages us to have faith like a child. But in and of itself, Peter’s faith was showing all the trust in Jesus, that is until he saw the wind gushing in sloshing the water around, and then the waves were coming right at him, his human nature, logic, and mind all began to lose faith in Jesus and at the moment his faith left Jesus and went onto his own mind, he sank through the water, just like he should have before, but Jesus reached down, grabbed him and put him back into the boat.

I think all of us personify Peter. We are up and down when it comes to our trust in God. There are times when we look at the promises and we have confidence that Jesus will do what he says he will do. However there are other times when our sinful nature grabs hold of us and tempts us and we begin to doubt. It’s sad really. Peter was there when he saw Jesus miraculously feed the thousands, he was present when he healed the sick and dying, he had enough confidence to step out onto the water as if it were concrete, but with all of that in his mind he still doubted.

Jesus said to Peter: “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” How many times in our lives would this statement be true of us? Jesus was not talking about
Peter’s life of little faith, but at that moment, you lacked faith, it was little, why did you doubt me Jesus said?

What in our life today proves to us that Jesus still is grabbing hold of us and picking us out of the water and placing us in a better situation, but then looks at us and says come on guys why such little faith, you know I love you. Remember the last time you worried yourself sick? You prayed and prayed and prayed that God would help you. You kept wondering to yourself does God hear me. Is he really going to answer these prayers? And time passes by, and everything works out, and years later you hear things that happened around that specific situation and you remember all of the prayers you offered up, and then after a couple of years you then with twenty-twenty hindsight ability you can see the hand of God active and guiding things in your life so that it works out for your good.

When you finally realize that God indeed was active in your life, you are now beginning to realize how Peter felt when Jesus asked you of little faith why did you doubt me?

In the end there is no reason to doubt Jesus is there? He has in every situation come through and fulfilled all of the promises to the believers. There is not one promise that he made that he has not kept. And that is good, because the last promise that we as Christians have to really look forward to his Jesus’ promise to take us to be where he is. Because of Jesus and his life and death and resurrection, our faith in Jesus saves us.

Whatever might frighten us in life, whether it be the storms of this last weekend, the fear of the unknown, fear of losing our loved ones, Jesus looks to you and me and reminds us both, Take courage, it is I, Don’t be afraid. And there is no reason for us to fear. Surely Jesus is the Son of God!

AMEN