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St. John Lutheran Church
Waverly, Iowa
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“Walking On Water”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 14,

“During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and cried out in fear!

But immediately Jesus said, “Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid!”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Fear is the undertow in today’s Gospel. Fear threatens to swallow up Peter and the disciples in their little boat. Fear paralyzes us, wears us down, erodes our faith, generates doubt. But to the disciples' fear, and to ours, Jesus speaks His fear-less Word, "*Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.*"

To appreciate this miracle, you need to know a little bit about the Deep. In Gen. 1, when the earth was being created, darkness covered the Deep, Chaotic, swirling waters. The Spirit- the breath of God - blew over the face of the Deep. Now fast forward to Jesus. He’s walking on the water, the Deep, in the darkness, at three o'clock in the morning, with the wind blowing over the waters. Gen. 1 all over again - the Word, the water, the Spirit. God’s new creation is breaking in with Jesus!

The Deep also represented Death and the grave. The deep waters represented the underworld that swallowed you up like Jonah tossed into the drink. Sailors and fishermen feared the Deep as they feared Death. The Deep was filled with fearsome sea monsters - Leviathan, Behemoth, Rahab - monsters who would swallow you up and never spit you out - all pictures of satan. But in steps Jesus walking on water, and on the backs of Leviathan, Behemoth, Rahab; as if they were playthings. All the things that represent fear, death, and the grave have met their Maker and their match in Jesus. They can harm us none. One little word can fell them. Page 1

But the disciples don't realize that yet. The disciples were terrified, as we all are whenever our safety is threatened. We've all learned the hard way that life can go from calm to chaos in a matter of moments. No matter how hard you try, life tears you down, and you realize that you can't make it on your own. And that's scary!

Our text says, "***When evening came.....the boat was already a considerable distance from land, being buffeted by the waves, because the wind was against it.***" And the sight of a Jesus walking on the water doesn't exactly bring them comfort. The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost – and the vision of a ghost rarely brings comfort, only more fear. On Easter evening, when they saw the risen Christ, they said, 'It's a ghost!' Jesus said, 'A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I have.'

The greatest storm that night was not in the sky, or on the waves, but in those disciples' hearts. So what is it that calms the disciples' fears and our own? It's Jesus' words: '***Take heart. I AM. Do not be afraid!***' Jesus speaks calm to their fear, just as His words and the sight of His wounds calmed their fears on easter evening. This was no ghost, no boogy-monster, no phantom. It was flesh and blood Jesus, walking on the water. Do you realize how amazing this is? The water represents the great deep, death, the grave, and the abode of the devil. But here comes Jesus walking on the water. What's the point? Jesus is dancing all over death, the grave and the devil.

One thing I like about Peter, is that he usually says what everyone else is thinking. He'd seen the miracles - lepers cleansed, demons cast out, his mother-in-law healed instantly. But walking on water? This defied common sense. So Peter cries, "***Lord, if it's you, tell me to come out to you on the waves.***" Jesus said, '***Come!***' ***Then Peter got down, out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus.***' Now don't you try this at the swimming pool, or in the ocean. This is NOT one of those "***what would Jesus do***" moments. This word was for Peter alone, not even for the other eleven. They stayed high and dry in the boat.

But how can Peter walk on water? How can he do such great things? You know the catechism answer. It is not Peter or the water alone that does such great things; but the Word of God, spoken across the water from Jesus to Peter, and faith that clings to that Word spoken across the water, "***Come***", that does such great things. By the Word of Jesus, Peter shares in the miracle and dances on the Deep. Do you get it? **IN CHRIST, PETER IS NOW DANCING ALL OVER DEATH, THE GRAVE, AND THE DEVIL!** You and I, through faith in Jesus, share completely in Jesus' victory over our enemies – that's what it means. Romans 8, "***We are more than conquerors, through Him Who loved us.***" Page 2

So what's our problem? We take our eyes off of the victory that is ours' in Christ. Our text says, "***When Peter saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' IMMEDIATELY, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him.***"

Peter does fine so long as he fixes his eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith; and keeps His Word stuck in his ear. But you know how it goes. We have Spiritual ADD - attention deficit disorder. You start looking around, checking things out; and you begin to notice the wind and the whitecaps; and you try to steer the vessel of your life yourself – to go where you want to go, and to do what you want to do.

And when we do that, Jesus isn't at the center anymore, but you are - which is just what the devil, the world, and your flesh wants. You in the middle. There's just one problem: when you're facing the great DEEP or the storms of death, the grave, and the devil: YOU CAN'T SAVE YOU! When Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus, what does he say: "*Hey, wait a minute! Men can't walk on water!*" And he starts to drop down into the Deep like a rock.

Notice that when Peter was looking to Jesus, he was walking on water: dancing over death, the grave, and the devil; but as soon as he takes his eyes off of Jesus – 'all hell breaks loose' – because the great deep and the chaotic waters are also a picture of hell and judgment. Without Jesus, the storms of life are terrifying. What Peter needed at that moment was a way out of his storm. And Jesus will not disappoint. Peter saw what we all need to see in the storms of life: that, '***Jesus is our only way out!***' Peter was aware of two facts at that moment: Number 1 – I'm sinking! Number 2 – Jesus isn't. He's staying up! So he knows where he'd rather be. He'd rather swallow his pride than swallow sea water. So he cries out, '***Lord, save me!***'

Freeze frame that scene in your minds. Peter's about to go under. His eyes as wide as saucers. He catches one last breath, and before the waves swallow him, He cries out, "***Lord, save me!***" Now that you've got that picture of sinking Peter in your mind? You know who that is? That's you in your death. That's you being pulled under by the rip tide of sin and the Law. That's you, if you lose Christ. And you begin to lose Christ, when you lose sight of Christ in your life. That's you if you choose to live against your Baptism in Christ. That's you taking your eyes off of the Lord's Supper. All on your own, without Jesus, sinking down to death. **Page 3**

But immediately a firm hand reaches out, catches you, and holds you so tight it almost hurts, but you can tell He's not letting go. Ever. It's a familiar hand, a hand that reached out and caught the whole world on a cross in the darkness of that one Good Friday. The same hand that plucked Peter from the Deep, has plucked you up out of the great Deep of death and hell, by His pierced hands.

As soon as Peter is safe, Jesus says to him, "***Ye of little faith. Why did you doubt me?***" Do you think Jesus will fail you in your hour of need? Do you think that He who died for you, who went down to the depths of Sheol to save you, will abandon you? Do you think He Who IMMEDIATELY grabbed Peter – one of little faith - will turn a deaf ear to your cry for mercy?

Never! He says to you, "***Take heart! Do not be afraid! It is I!***" This Jesus is with you, all of your days, until the end of your days. The hand that snatches you from the jaws of death will not let you go. We do not NEED to fear anything in this world, for nothing can break His hold on you: not the cancers, not the bullets, not the bullies, not the terrorists, not the government, not the devil, not even your sin. When doubt overtakes you, and sin overwhelms you, and waves of guilt start washing over you, and threaten to drown you, say with Peter, "***Lord, save me.***" And, "***IMMEDIATELY, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him.***" Notice, in Jesus' rescue, reversals are happening. Things go from chaos to calm, from panic to peace, from ghost to Savior, from unbelief to faith, from sinner to forgiven, from helpless to rescued, and from death to life!

Before the storm hits, it's easy to keep Jesus at a distance. So why does Jesus allow storms? "Because a storm is a small price to pay for a clear view of your Savior!"

When Jesus and Peter climbed back into the boat to join the others. The wind died down, the storm stopped, and there was peace with Jesus in that little boat. Peter didn't admire his hand and say, "*I sure had a good grip on you, Lord, didn't I?*" And he didn't boast about his little walk on the water. He and the rest of the disciples did the only thing that's left to do, when Jesus has done it all - they worshipped Him, and said: "***Truly, you are the Son of God!***"

That too is a picture of you and me here this morning: yanked from the Deep by the strong hand of Jesus, in our Baptism; united with Christ by water and the Spirit; huddled together in a little congregation adrift on the high and stormy seas of a shifting culture. And you know what? We couldn't be safer, because Jesus is with us! Welcome Aboard. AMEN!