**Matthew 14:22-33**

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24** but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. **25** And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. **26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” **28** And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. **30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” **31** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

**“Reason Captive To Christ”**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Those who have never suffered the storms of life will miss today’s Gospel reading. Most know the story of Jesus walking on the water. The problem with such a familiar text is that we start to play with it. In other words, the Gospel gets replaced for some lesser glory that finally does no good. Here is what I mean, you could summarize the story saying, “Jesus comes to us in our troubles, if we trust and hold on by walking with him things will calm down so we get to the other side.” This kind of pop-culture preaching sounds positive maybe even motivational, but it is neither true nor comforts sinners in their greatest time of need.

 What happens when the storms, wind, and waves continue in life no matter how long you wait? Where is this calm walking on water for the Christian struggling with alcoholism, pornography, or other addictions? How can those in Iraq and Syria suffering genocide get to the better side of life when their confession of Christ leads to death? The story of Jesus walking on the water is not a quick “pick me up” for today. Instead, the Gospel is an ongoing miracle of salvation that has come in God’s Son. The presence of Jesus and His Word is what justifies and forgives sinners. This is why faith is not what we create, possess, or will by our efforts. St. Paul told us, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Count on Christ for He strengthens and keeps us safe by His Word.

 The disciples were never that attentive, but Jesus was always watching out for them. Having finished feeding thousands by a miracle of God’s grace, the situation was changing into something else. Those who ate the fill of food were now trying to turn Christ into a glory king. If it would not happen by His consent, they were ready to make Him king by force. Jesus could see the temptation presented by Satan. It was to serve self and not be king of the cross. Let alone this glory of man was a danger to His disciples snuffing out whatever faith they had. So as the God who defends sinners, Jesus changed the situation. “Immediately (Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.”

 Christ preaches to protect against unseen dangers. He did this for you by baptism. God’s better Word watches over your life. Jesus knows how to keep those joined to Him safe. His Church is not the worldly crowds. Seeking after glory for this life only ends up trying to change the gift God gives of His Son. So, what do we discover? No one else makes this distinction but Jesus. He does it for our good promising to protect and guard those in the boat. The Church will never be just like the culture. It is because Christ directs and changes our lives away from dangers that threaten faith in Him. We wonder why God does not let certain things happen. In truth, it might be the greater blessing. His Will is to keep the Gospel alive and that only comes by His Word keeping us safe.

 The disciples followed the Word of Jesus. They went ahead of Him to cross about a 7-8 mile stretch of water. Facing storms on the sea of Galilee was nothing new for these experienced fishermen. Of course, this time everything happened according to what none of them would have ever planned to see. They were in the middle of the lake exhausted from all the work of getting nowhere. It was dark with wind and waves clouding their senses. Besides everything else, unlike when Jesus calmed the storm the first time now He was not even in the boat! There was real fear and when Jesus came walking on the water seafaring superstition took over seeing Him to be a ghost. Like speaking to frightened children, Jesus gave sight to blind fear declaring, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” This was no less the same God who at the burning bush told Moses, “I am who I am.”

 Christ preaches to remove fear of what man does see. Those seeking comfort by looking to works find only fear. It must be this way for the Law demands more and more. It drains you dry to be beaten and battered just like the disciples, even if they wanted to do what Jesus said they could not cross the lake. However, learn the glory to see in the Church. The task of the Gospel is to remove fear with a better Word God speaks for sinners. The superstitious chatter about luck, bad karma, experimenting with the spiritual we see saturating our culture only keeps us from hearing Christ. He walked not merely on water, but over all the power of this world by His sacrifice on the cross. As St. Paul proclaims, “But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)…” The word of faith is what the Gospel gives against all that we fear. Christ says to His Church, “Do not be afraid.” It is no less Him saying, “Your sins are forgiven.” This rich treasure greet us every Sunday and is a daily promise.

 The disciples all heard Christ, but Peter wanted confirmation. With a single word, “come.” God made a man walk on water by the power of His Word. Where Jesus walked without risk to Himself because He was the Word made flesh, Peter had to be fully reliant on Jesus. Yet, only a few steps out of the boat and doubt dragged Peter down into the depths of fear. The miracle was never in him only Jesus working through him. Doubt is what drove His Word away and along with it faith. This is what happened to all the disciples later at the cross, but when the storm of His suffering and death passed. The risen savior told them, “Do not be afraid.” Peter dragged down by doubt, still cried out, “Lord, save me.” Even a little faith was able to confess the need for rescue. Whether strong or weak, what matters was the faith that looked to Jesus. “Come” was more than a miracle to walk on water, but an invitation to trust in His Word at all times.

 Christ preaches to save you from doubts that destroy seeing Him. Despair cannot recognize what God gives for salvation. Plenty in society and even in the church live with the burden of seeking to justify their life, trying to do more to make it better, or despairing over what they do not see. This is the weight of works that none can carry. The Word and Sacrament is Jesus confirming His presence as the promise to save. Our Lutheran Fathers state, “We teach that such a certainty of faith is required in the Gospel; our opponents leave consciences wavering and uncertain. Consciences do nothing from faith if they always doubt whether they have forgiveness” (Tappert 195:89). If Jesus did not remove the separation standing between God and man by His sacrifice, there would be none reaching out to save from sin, death, and the Devil. Yet, Christ proclaims in His feast of victory, “Given and shed for you.” He destroys doubt to hold fast to what God does for you. Count on Christ for He strengthens and keeps us safe by His Word. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.