

Matthew 14:22-33 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."

Dear Christian Friends,

Last Sunday's Gospel lesson was the account of the well-known miracle, the Feeding of the 5000. In the account, lessons abound for all Jesus' disciples as we learn to trust in him who is the Great Provider of all we need physically, spiritually, eternally. But that day, as the twelve basketfuls of leftover fish and bread were collected, things turned a bit ugly.

You see, the people on that serene, shoreline hillside recognized that it was Jesus who had filled their bellies with good things. Yes, spiritual things, too, but a full belly makes for a happy camper. And so there was a growing desire sweeping through the crowd to turn this spiritual miracle into a political salvation. The people wanted to make Jesus their Bread King. After all, if he could do this, they would never be hungry again.

And you might think, come on people, this is Jesus. Providing bread is the least of his abilities. Surely Jesus' true disciples would know that. Ah, but the gospel of Mark gives us this spiritual insight. He tells us under inspiration that the disciples *had not understood [either] about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.* They missed that Jesus is so much more than some bread for life. They needed to learn that Jesus is the Bread of Life who feeds and rescues for eternal life.

As we disciples who are sailing on the sea of life this day, straining at the oars, longing to reach the other side, crying out to

be saved and confidently seeking our Savior's rescue and life, please, join...

Well, this is it... what is, for many of us, the last big weekend of Summer. School starts tomorrow / Monday. And so, many of us feel compelled to swim or walk or bike or boat one last time before the schedule gets even more crazy and the frigid Minnesota fall begins.

In our Gospel lesson for today, the disciples also felt compelled to do a little boating. In fact, Jesus was the compelling factor. Since both the crowds and the disciples were entertaining the wrong thoughts about Jesus, he compelled the disciples to get away from the inappropriate "group-think" that was going on and head back home. There Jesus could and would teach them to properly understand.

Home was a six-mile row across the Sea of Galilee. It had been late in the day already when Jesus preformed his miraculous feeding. But now, after cleaning up, it would have been near sunset when the disciples were compelled by Jesus to head out on the lake.

Meanwhile, Jesus dispersed the crowd, *not* with yet another display of power, but with his expressed need to worship and pray. And so, as the people return to their homes and campsites for the night, Jesus ascended the hill and prayed long into the night.

But somewhere between 3 and 6 AM, after a good 5 or six hours, Jesus was concluding his prayers. The disciples found themselves still in the middle of the lake, pulling on the oars and making no headway because of the strong winds and crashing waves. Understand that this was no storm, per se. It would have been a windy spring night with likely a near full moon casting an eerie glow upon the troubled waters. As the disciples were struggling to keep the boat headed in the right direction and not lose ground against the stiff winds, in the midst of heavy seas, they look up to see a figure walking up alongside them, walking on the water!

As foolish as it may sounds at first glance, one can understand their reaction. A figure walking on water, an eerie glow in the

moonlight – you do the math. It all adds up to a ghost. Grown men cried out in fear.

But with the same word that Jesus used when he healed the paralytic dropped through a roof-top, and with the same word that Jesus would use when he assured his disciples that against all evidence – even his death on a cross – that he *has overcome the world*, Jesus tells the disciples in the boat to *take courage, fear not* for it is Jesus who comes to save them.

But Peter isn't so sure. In a mix of doubt and presumption – as only poor impetuous Peter could say it – he cried out *Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water*. And as only Jesus could lovingly invite, he simply said *Come*.

Can you even imagine what that must have been like? On the one hand, I have to admit that, even with Jesus bidding me to *Come*, I would have had trouble jumping out of a perfectly good boat, into a tempestuous sea. But on the other hand, hasn't this same Jesus invited us to *Come to [him], all who are weary and burdened* for there we will find *rest for [our] souls*? He who said that also says *Come to me...for the kingdom belongs to such as these. Come to me and drink. Come to me; hear me that your soul may live*.

Yes, here we are, sailing on the sea of life, struggling on the oars against the buffeting winds, fearful for our very lives, and Jesus says, *Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Come*. And come we do, to hear and to learn and to be blessed and to be comforted and to be assured. We cautiously take those steps each day with a mixture of doubt and presumption, humility and confidence.

But then things happen, don't they? We're looking at Jesus, but all of a sudden we get distracted by the wind and waves of temptation. Criticism crashes. Rumors rise. Gossip grows. Selfishness swamps. Self-pity swells. The sea of life churns. The winds of temptation howl. And we find ourselves sinking quickly into the depths of guilt and despair with but one hope shining within the vale: *Lord, save me...*

...and he does. He reaches down with those nail-pierced hands and pulls us up from the depths. He carries us to safety in the ark of the Church where we are

assured of his forgiveness through the waters of baptism and the holy food of his sacrificed body and blood. He calms the howling winds of temptation with his powerful Word. And he gently chides and invites our thankful response of faith.

Look at what happened in the boat that early morning. *Jesus reached out his hand and caught [Peter]. "You of little faith," [Jesus] 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 ... not a Bread King, not a magician, not a political messiah. No, those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

In few minutes, we will close worship today by singing a hymn composed by Tommy Dorsey (*not* of Big Band Fame; a different one) entitled *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*. Six years before publishing the hymn, Dorsey had been asked to sing at a revival meeting in St. Louis. Leaving his pregnant wife behind in South Chicago, Dorsey made the trip. But after two days, he received a telegram saying that his wife had suddenly gone into contractions and died giving premature birth to a son. Dorsey hurried back to Chicago. But only a few hours after arriving home, his newborn son also died. Distracted from the precious promises of his Savior by the storms of heartache and grief, Dorsey would later admit, "I felt that God had done me an injustice. I didn't want to serve him anymore..."

But later that same year, while visiting a friend, Dorsey sat down at a piano and began to play a hymn tune that he vaguely remembered from Sunday School as a child. He began to say, "Blessed Lord! Blessed Lord!" But the friend walked over and said, "Why don't you make that Precious Lord?"

Yes, our precious Lord bids us come, all who are weary and burdened. For we will find rescue and rest, light and life. *Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand; I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord; Lead me home. Amen.*