

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 9, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

"It is I – Do Not Be Afraid"

Heavenly Father, we are amazed and in awe of this miracle that your Son, Jesus Christ performed – actually 2 miracle, three if you read carefully. He walked on water, He had Peter walk on water, and then He calmed the wind and the waves. For He is Lord of all. Open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds to your Holy Word today, that we would heed the truth and respond to it. In the precious Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

In last week's Holy Gospel and sermon – do you remember Jesus feeding all of those people? What an amazing miracle. In today Holy Gospel, I want you to notice that the first word is – "*immediately*" showing a real sense of urgency, because it was such a fevered pitch at the time. In the time of Jesus – the crowd that He fed was in the thousands - five thousand men – and then the women and children. If there was a family of three it had to be more like fifteen thousand – with twelve baskets of leftovers – that is pretty amazing! Can you just imagine a crowd that large wanting a piece of you?

The Holy Gospel shows us a rising tide of emotion – and the need for the apostles to move – and right now. "*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.*" (Matthew 14:22) The Gospel of Mark similarly tells us, "*Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away.*" (Mark 6:45) Things were starting to build up and the people were looking to make Jesus their King. John's account paints a crystal-clear picture of the atmosphere as well. "*So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.*" (John 6:15) Is it any wonder that Jesus sent the disciples away, and that He wanted to have some alone time with the Father, and so He did it without delay!

The Apostles were on the south western side of the Sea of Galilee and setting out to head to Bethsaida, in the northwest, which by the way means "*house of fishing.*" Bethsaida is not far from the village where Peter's mother-in-law lives, Capernaum. If you have ever been to the Sea of Galilee you know that there are times when it seems as smooth as glass, but in a moments' notice the wind can whip up from the mountains, and it can get pretty wild. As a matter of fact I lost a hat to the Sea of Galilee when we were on a boat in 1999. It was a neat hat too! It was an Israeli Army hat that I bought in one of the many gift shops.

You know, fishermen were quite often out on the lake at night and there are gospel accounts of them fishing all night and catching nothing. Jesus told them to go back out and lower their nets. On this night, the wind must have been pretty strong because as today's Holy Gospel says, "*when evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.*" (Matthew 14:23-24) Think of a picture of people rowing a boat – because the sails would be just going crazy. Rowing and rowing, trying to make the boat go someplace. Mark's Gospel says "*the boat was in the middle*

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 9, 2020, Year A

of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them." (Mark 6:48) The Gospel of John says that they had only gone "*three or four miles.*" (John 6:19) Apparently they were really struggling! They had taken down the sails and were using only the oars to try to maintain some control of the boat. Jesus walks out toward them. Now remember, Jesus is not just walking on water, as amazing as that is, but He had to have walked the three or four miles just to catch up with them!

There is a lot going on here! It is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John – unlike the synoptic Gospels that Deacon Bob talked about last week -Matthew, Mark and Luke. Scripture is coming to life before them, and us, as to Jesus' true identity and His real power – that the apostles would connect from Scripture. Like from Job:

- "*Who alone stretches out the heavens and tramples down the waves of the sea?*" (Job 9:8)
- and "*Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?*" (Job 38:16)
- From Isaiah: "*I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.*" Thus says the LORD, *Who makes a way through the sea and a path through the mighty waters.*" (Isaiah 43:15-16)

The Gospels say that Jesus "*came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and *said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."* (Mark 6:48-50) We need to remember that Mark's Gospel is given to us from Peter's point of view. He was the eyewitness who told John Mark, his friend about this experience. Many look at the phrase "*He intended to pass by them*" as an indication that Jesus was heading on without them. This phrase of "*passing by*" we have heard before: once with Moses and once with Elijah. How remarkable that once again Jesus refers to the "Law" (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) without even saying a word, much like on that mount of Transfiguration – when He was joined by Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets and His appearance changed on that mountain – and I want to suggest to you that His appearance changed on that water as well. He may have been glowing and so they thought He was a ghost. Listen to God's words to Moses in Exodus 33, when God allows Moses to witness His presence. "*And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."* But He said, "*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*" Then the LORD said, "*Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.*" (Exodus 33:19-22) Here Jesus – God Incarnate - is passing by His chosen twelve – after they witnessed His compassion in feeding the five thousand and healing many of that multitude.

Elijah went to the mountain waiting for God's voice: "*So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD."* And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 9, 2020, Year A

wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"" (1Kings 19:11-13) Elijah witnessed the presence of God in the "still small voice." You have heard me say before that in Hebrew the word "wind" is the same word as "spirit" – "*Ruach*."

Jesus was showing the apostles His glory, His power over ALL creation, and once again His compassion for them as He saves them from the terrible storm. Jesus, having compassion upon them, cries out to them who He really is. All three Gospels (Mark 6, John 6, and today's Holy Gospel of Matthew 14) are eyewitness accounts and give the same account that Jesus tells these screaming men to take courage and not be afraid – and He says "*It is I*." The literal meaning is "I am" or in Greek "*ego eimi*" (ἐγώ εἰμι). It is the same as saying "*the I Am is here*" or "*I, Yahweh, am here*" – I want you to consider that. Do you remember we learn God's identity in Exodus 3:14 as the answer to Moses' question about who should he say is sending him? The Lord said "*I AM WHO I AM*." Then second, the Prophet Isaiah gives us God's words: "*Who has performed and accomplished it, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He*." (Isaiah 41:4) Do you see the parallels going on here? God also confirms this in Isaiah 43:10, 51:12, and 52:6. Jesus laid out the clues.

Peter asks Jesus that if it is Him – to let Peter come out of the boat to Him. Jesus said "*Come*." Peter walked out to Jesus until he realized what he was doing. Jesus reached out to him, and saved him. Proof? You want proof? In their time of need – "*I Am*" came to their aid! The Son of God – Jesus of Nazareth, got into the boat and they were amazed. The Gospel says "*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*" (Matthew 14:32-33) Proof? You need proof? These Apostles witnessed five thousand or more people being fed with just five loaves and two fish, they were sent out two by two and healed people, they were driving out demons, and they heard every single word that Jesus taught – but yet they still were not sure of what they were witnessing. You might say that they were still 'spiritually blind,' not because of sin or rejecting Jesus, but because of their own lack of paying attention to what God was doing right in their midst. Their minds were dull. How many of us have driven in a bad storm or in a heavy fog, as if there were a veil over their eyes. How can anyone who has witnessed, first hand, the feeding of these many thousands, along with Jesus healing people and walking on the water, and His calming the stormy seas, still not know who Jesus was? The answer is simply this – no man can know Jesus unless the Holy Spirit gives him eyes to see Him for who He really is, and ears to hear and digest His Holy Word. How many times have you heard me pray a prayer at the beginning of a sermon asking for God to "*open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds to hear the message You have given us?*" The disciples could not know Jesus as God, until it was revealed to them. They could not understand the meaning of all of the signs and miracles until they could truly know the God that created those miracles.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 9, 2020, Year A

The apostles could have been asking themselves - how much has Jesus been doing in our lives that we have not seen? How many miracles have happened that we didn't recognize because we were too busy or distracted to see what God was doing? Are we spiritually blind? Can we see God at work in our very midst, or do we count it all as circumstantial? There are no such things as coincidences! I like to call them God-incidences. Everything happens for a reason.

I want you to look around this church, and I want you to see the miracles that are here, the miracles that have happened in each one of our lives. Look down the pew – you will see a miracle. I am looking at several right now – indeed.

Are you fearful of the storms of your life? Do you feel like you are about to go under for the last time? Remember in this Gospel, Peter started to sink because he realized what was happening to him. Jesus grabbed him by the hand and they both got into the boat - together. Do you feel like Jesus just might pass you by? Please ask God for Him to give to you eyes to see Him as He really is. Ask Him that you would recognize His hand at work in your life. Call out to Him and let Him speak peace into your heart and life. Then let the Holy Spirit give you the peace that surpasses all understanding so that you too can see and know Jesus as He really is. Jesus loves you so much and He wants to come to you. He not only wants to get into your boat – He wants to be in your heart.