

9th Sunday after Pentecost
"Do Not Be Afraid"
Matthew 14:22-33

How many of you have ever been on a big lake or on large body of water, in a small boat?

Almost every summer when I was growing up, we would visit my Grandma Ingeborg and my cousins in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. I remember one particular fishing trip with my cousin Donny and my uncle Mike because we went to one of Minnesota's largest lakes, Lake Winnibigosh and I got to experience what it feels like to be on a big lake, in a small boat.

It's a great lake when the sun is out and it's calm, but you don't want to be too far from shore if the wind comes up. Even a little wind can kick up some pretty huge waves.

Now that you have that picture in your mind, imagine Jesus' disciples out on the Sea of Galilee. If you looked it up on-line or in a Bible atlas, you'd find that the Sea of Galilee, is not your average lake. At thirteen miles long and eight miles wide you can imagine what it felt like when a windstorm came up.

In today's Gospel, the disciples had been trying to cross from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other. Remember, the width of the lake was about eight miles. So when the wind came up and was blowing against them, you can probably imagine the size of the waves that were battering against the prow of their boat. Because of the wind and the waves, their trip across the lake, was taking far longer than usual. And to make matters worse, evening had come and they were still far from shore.

So picture this, here they were, possibly as far as four miles from land, fighting against a strong wind, with waves battering their boat, and it was getting dark. So you can imagine why they were a little on edge.

In fact, as the Gospel reading continues, we find out that disciples ended up spending the entire night on the lake, drifting and battling the storm.

Then, in verse 25, in the early morning, all of a sudden they see, what looked like a "ghost," walking across the water towards them. After everything they had been through, it's not hard to understand, why they were terrified.

So just imagine, what a shock it must have been to hear a familiar voice calling out to them, saying, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

Do those words sound familiar?

These words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid" are the key to this Gospel story.

These words help us understand what God is doing through Jesus, in this particular event.

And as we begin to see how God used these words to say something very important to the disciples, we will also see what God is saying to us.

When Jesus said, “Do not be afraid,” he was echoing a very familiar message in Scripture.

In Isaiah, chapter 43, God says to the people of Israel,

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.”

When an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, the angel said,

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her womb, is of the Holy Spirit.”

When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary he said,

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

And the first words the angel spoke to the shepherds, were

“Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy, which will come to all people.”

And, at the empty tomb, an angel said to Mary Magdalene and the other women

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen.”

In each of these examples, we hear God deliver a message to his people,

God says, “no matter what circumstance you find yourself in, no matter how bad things look, or how frightened you are, remember one thing, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

That is also what God is saying, in today’s Gospel reading.

But during that storm, in the middle of the night, four miles from shore, things didn’t look so good for Jesus’ disciples. I’m sure they were tempted to think, “Where is Jesus?”

“He’s always available when the crowds, come looking for him.

“Where is he now that we need him?”

But think back to the Gospel story. Where was Jesus when they began to panic?

He was up on the mountain, praying for them.

Jesus, had sent them on ahead, so that he could spend some time alone with His Heavenly Father.

Now if you were in that boat, battling against the waves, wouldn’t it give you a sense of peace to know that God is in control and that Jesus was praying for you?

Evidently, Jesus' disciples hadn't quite understood that.
And sometimes we forget as well.

Sometimes we feel like we are caught out in the dark, battling against the waves of life.
And sometimes we feel abandoned and alone, fighting those battles all by ourselves.
And we begin to be filled with worry and fear.

The waves of life for us might be illness or grief.
It might be the stress of our work, or lack of work, or a conflict in our family.
It might be depression, or a battle with addiction.

And just like Jesus' disciples we might forget that we are not alone.

No matter how dark it seems. No matter what circumstance you find yourself in,
the one message God wants you to hear this morning is spoken on the lips of Jesus:

“Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.”

Just as Jesus heard His disciples and came to them.
Jesus hears your prayers and will come to you.

Even when our faith is weak like Peter, when we have doubts, and feel like we are sinking.
Jesus will stretch out his hand like He did to Peter,
and in spite of our doubts, He will lift us up and bring us back into the boat, to a safe place.

When Jesus does this in your life, may you turn to Him,
and just as the disciples did, may you respond by worshipping and giving thanks to our Savior
and Lord. Amen