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Pentecost 13

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Wet Disciples”

Text: Matthew 14:22-33

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I would like to walk on water. Sometimes pastors think they should. Sometimes folks expect their pastors to . . . but you all know me better than that! Perhaps you would like to walk on water to – living the Christian life above the fray and the troubles of life. But the truth is that the church is filled with wet disciples. Disciples that thought they were strong and faith-filled, and then found out they were weak and those of little faith. Disciples who thought they could go to Jesus, and then found out it is far more important for Jesus to come to us. Disciples like Peter. Disciples like you and me.

Because you're just like Peter, aren't you? There are times when you are full of faith and eager to see what God is going to do next in your life. What plans He has for you. How He is going to bless you. What good things and successes are in store for you. And you're eager to walk out in faith and be a part of it . . . only the next moment to have the bottom drop out from under you and you find yourself up to your neck in crashing waves of trouble, struggling for breath between mouthfuls of salty seawater, and crying out "*Lord, save me!*"

Sounds like my life. What about you? What is it that has sent you sinking lately? That threatens to overwhelm, that causes you despair, that creates doubts and second-guessing in your mind and heart? That makes you a wet disciple – once again having to be pulled out of the sea by Jesus and put back into the boat of the church?

At just such times, perhaps you wonder if you're any good to God at all. You don't know enough to stay in the boat, and when you get out all you keep doing is failing and sinking! How long will God allow this cycle to go on? How long before we have enough faith not to sink? How long must the church be filled with wet disciples?

But is being we a bad thing? It is if you think sinking is a *bad* thing. If you think Peter never should have gotten out of that boat in the first place, or think that he should have at least had enough faith to stay on top of the water. But are those thoughts *right* thoughts?

Peter didn't get out of the boat on a whim. He was a lot of things, but he wasn't dumb! He was an experienced fisherman, knew something about that lake, had probably seen men tossed overboard before, and knew the danger – especially during a storm such as the one they were caught in! Peter got out of the boat because he knew Jesus was the Lord of creation. You see, Peter had learned his lesson well. Just hours before, he had just seen Jesus feed over 5,000 people in the wilderness with only five loaves of bread and two fish. The miracle made an impression on him. And then when Jesus came out to them, walking on the water, Peter put it all together: the God who fed Israel with manna in the wilderness and ruled the waters of the Red Sea by dividing them, was here and working in this man Jesus! This was a good thing, and Peter wanted to be a part of it. And Peter didn't just jump out of the boat on his own– he waited for the word of Jesus. So we don't want to say that Peter shouldn't have gotten out of the boat. Peter got out of the boat that morning in faith.

Ah, but then we think if that's so, Peter's faith should have been stronger. And if his faith had only been stronger, he could have held out; he could have passed the test; he wouldn't have sunk. After all, the storm ended once they got back to the boat. *Maybe he could have done it. He should have been able to do it. . . .* We think that way because that's what we think of ourselves. That we should be stronger, we should be more steadfast, we shouldn't doubt or fear the storms of our lives, we shouldn't sink. Because sinking is failure. Sinking is bad, isn't it?

Or . . . is sinking exactly what we need?

Perhaps that sounds funny to you, but it's true. Sinking is the best thing that could have happened to Peter, and it's the best thing that can happen to us. For unless we sink, we will not cry out. Unless we sink, we will not take refuge in our Saviour but rely on ourselves. We'll be content or even proud of how we're doing. And so in mercy and love, God sinks us in order to save us. He brings low in order to exalt. He crushes in order to save. Because there is no other way. No other way to get us to let go of the things of this world. No other way to get us to stop relying on ourselves and our own ability and wisdom and strength. No other way to get us to realize that we

cannot save ourselves. . . . For while you know all that, in your head and in your heart, and like Peter, believe it – it still takes sinking to get us to live it. To repent and cry out, “*Lord, save me!*”

The good news is that such a prayer Jesus *never* gets tired of hearing! It is not possible to pray those words too much. For that is exactly why the Lord of creation came into our world. That is exactly why the Son of God came to us sinking sinners in the person of Jesus – not to chastise us in our sin, but to sink into the depths of our sin and our grave by the cross, that in His resurrection – not His almighty hand of judgment and justice, but His nail-pierced hand of mercy and forgiveness – be the hand to pull us out. That the water we sink in not be the chaotic water of sin and doubt and death, but be transformed into the water where our Saviour is; the water where our Saviour saves; the water of Holy Baptism. That the church be filled with wet disciples – sunk in our sin, but raised to new life in Jesus.

And so a church filled with wet disciples is a *good* thing. For that is not a church of the perfect or of failures, but of the forgiven. It is not a church of the strong, but of the repentant. Not a church where everything is only safe and good, but where it is confessed that our Lord uses all things for good. That when my pride is hurt, when my sin and failures are pointed out, when what I thought I could count on in this world is taken away, when the future is uncertain, when I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, when I am afraid, when I think I am alone, when I think I can’t go on, when I think no one knows, when I think I am no use at all and that God has given up on me, when I have no where else to turn but to cry out “*Lord, save me!*” . . . He does. The storms will not last too long, but just long enough. Just long enough to get me wet, that I may live in Him. In Jesus, my Saviour. And confess “*Truly you are the Son of God.*”

Yes, the Son of God come *for me*. His hand reaching me in this water. His hand feeding me with this food. His hand touching me here with His forgiveness. Here that I may live and not die. Not that I may walk on water, but to make me wet. A wet disciple. Crucified with Christ. Dead now to sin. And alive in Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.