9 August 2020 Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 10 Vienna, VA

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"Lord! Save! (And He Does!)"
Text: Matthew 14:22-33 (Job 38:4-18; Romans 10:5-17)

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

Lord, save me!

That is the cry of faith. Little faith, big faith, all faith. Faith that looks to the Lord for all that is needed. In good times, bad times, all times.

And it is exactly what the Lord has come to do. These are exactly the right words to exactly the right man. The God man. The God *in the flesh* man.

If your faith isn't crying that out, the Lord will seek to make it so. First, by coming to you. And second, giving you a reason to cry out to Him. That your faith be in the right place. In Him, and no where and no one, else.

Is that mean? To afflict you that you will cry out to Him? No. It is saving. And so it is most loving. Though it may not seem so at the time. Though it surely didn't seem so to Peter, who was deeply afraid, terrified, as he was sinking like a stone. But the fear is not from God. The fear is from us and our sin which distrusts God. The situation may be from God, but not to cause fear, but faith. That He might work good. That we rely on Him. That we trust in Him.

Did the disciples need this? Apparently so. Just before this, Jesus fed the 5,000 with only five loaves of bread and two fish. When He asked, the disciples hadn't turned to Him in faith - they said to send the crowds away because we don't have enough. Jesus didn't have enough. Really?

So now a faith building exercise. Orchestrated by Jesus. He purposefully sends the disciples out by themselves while He stays behind. It was tough going, but they were doing alright. They had made significant progress. They were ***a long way from land***, Matthew tells us. They probably would have made it to the other side. But Jesus doesn't wait for them to do so, He causes trouble for them - He walks out to them on the water. It wasn't just because He missed the boat! He frightens His disciples - <u>*so*</u> they will call to Him in faith. ***Lord, save!***

Is that mean? To afflict them so? No. It is to teach. To strengthen. To expose *their* weakness and demonstrate *His* strength.

Perhaps all this Covid stuff has done the same for us. Exposed our weakness. We who thought we were so strong. We who can put a man on the moon. We can solve any problem. And then a tiny little germ comes along and proves us weak. Throws the world into a tizzy. Shuts down the economy. We were doing fine. Making headway against all the storms of this world and life. And then we weren't. And did we cry out ***Lord, save?!*** Or did we cry out, *why God? If it's you, God, why did this happen?* Maybe both.

Truth is, you think you *are* able, strong, wise. You prove it by how you live your life and how you try to accomplish so much apart from God. Even in the church. By how often you rely on your own wisdom and strength, rather than in prayer and the Word. When you think God *really* should be doing this or that, solving this problem or that, giving us this or that, instead of what He is doing.

Until your weakness is exposed. Until the Lord disrupts things. The disciples may have been able to get to the other side of the lake, but Jesus wants more for them than just that. And for you.

So Jesus frightens His disciples. Walks to them on the water. That He may speak His Word to them. When they saw Him, they were troubled. He says, ***Take heart***. They thought it was a ghost. He says: ***It is I***, not a ghost. They were frightened. He says, ***stop being afraid***. He does nothing but speak. But that is enough.

Or it should be.

But apparently not for Peter. ***Lord, IF it is you . . .*** Someone else had spoken similar words before, to challenge Jesus. In the wilderness. *IF you are the Son of God* (Matthew 4) . . . show it! Command these stones to become bread. Throw yourself off the Temple. Jesus refused satan. But He does not refuse His child. For He was there to defeat satan, but to save His child Peter. So He speaks again. Another word: ***COME!*** One word only. But that is enough. For it is a word that is at the same time both command AND promise. Promise that Peter would be able to do so. Or maybe better, that He could *enable* Peter to do so.

And God's Word does what it says. For God's Word always does what it says. *Until it doesn't . . . ?*

For Peter begins to sink. All is lost, right?

No. It is for Peter to no longer say, ***Lord, IF it is you***, but ***Lord, save!*** You are the one who commanded me! You are the one who gave me your Word! ***Lord! Save!***

If he hadn't sunk, what would have been the result of his stroll upon the water? Would Peter have been puffed up in himself? Proud of himself? Maybe. We'll never know. But we know how it is with us. How easily we tend to pride in ourselves and what we are able to do. Think ourselves strong and able. We need our weakness exposed.

It doesn't say exactly what brought Peter to his realization of the storm, what caused this change in him, but if Jesus orchestrated this whole thing, sending His disciples out alone, walking to them on the water, then its not a stretch to think that this was part of it, too. In a previous incident, Jesus calmed the wind and waves with just His Word. Maybe He whipped them up a bit here; caused a little extra wind and waves for Peter's sake - for they're nothing to Jesus. Remember, Peter?

Well, no. He doesn't. He is sinking! Like a rock. How appropriate. That's what his name means, after all! The name *Jesus* gave him! Now, he has only one thing on his mind . . .

Lord, save me!

Is that mean? To afflict Peter so? No. Luther liked to preach that this is God acting as a true father. Like a father holding his child in his arms and then suddenly letting go. The child cries out: *Dad!* And the father immediately grabs her; doesn't let her fall. He wouldn't do that. It's like a game, Luther says, to strengthen her in the little things, that her faith be strengthened for the big things.

So Peter begins to sink. ***Lord! Save!*** And ***immediately***, Matthew tells us, ***immediately***, He does. Jesus grabs Peter. Doesn't let him sink. He wouldn't do that. It is but a light, momentary affliction, that our faith be in the right place - in Him, not in ourselves. And that our faith be strengthened. That we know, as Paul said to us today, that ***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.***

And it wasn't just Peter. Think through the Scriptures, how often God does this. What about Abraham? Sacrifice your son, your only son, Isaac! Was God letting him and His promise go? No. He wouldn't do that. God grabs Him. What about Joseph in Egypt? Had God let him sink, let him die in prison? No. God grabs him. What about the three young men in the fiery furnace? Them, too, God grabs. Reaches out His hand to save.

But then, later, Peter would see something different . . . that saving hand *weak*, unable to grab him . . . **for it had a nail through it**. And was attached to a cross. That hand that had marvelously and miraculously multiplied the loaves and fish to feed so many. That hand that had created all things (as we heard in the reading from Job). That hand that touched and healed lepers, that touched and blessed so many, young and old . . . now limp and lifeless and dead. Peter begins to sink again. All is lost, right?

No! Peter will see that hand again reach out to him, to grab him again, to save him. That hand - no longer limp, lifeless, and dead - will stretch itself out and allow his astonished fingers to be put into it. Because that hand has come to save, and save it will. Save us from our doubts, our fears, our sins, our death. For it is the hand of the one who sits at the Father's right hand, is His right-hand man, and ascended back to that same place. Not to be gone, but to powerfully continue to reach out to us. Saving. Pulling us out of our cesspools of doubt and death. When by His Word our weakness is exposed. When by His Word He enables us to cry out, ***Lord! Save!***

Which we are again about to do! Did you realize that? You do so here every Sunday in fact. When you confess your sins, you are really crying out ***Lord save!*** And He speaks, as He did to those disciples: ***Take heart, it is I, stop being afraid*** of your sins. I forgive them. All of them. They can condemn you no more. And with that we are reminded, too, of our Baptism, when our Lord's hand reached out to us and grabbed us, saved us, through water and His Word.

And when we sing *Lord have mercy*, we are really crying out ***Lord save!*** Have mercy on us, for if you didn't, we would be lost. And He does. For again, He speaks to us His Word, His Gospel, grabbing us with His promises to provide all that we need.

But most of all, we do so when we sing *Hosanna!* The Hebrew word for ***Lord save!*** And as He did with Peter, Jesus stretches out His hand. And He grabs you with His Words . . . *Take eat, this is My body. Take drink, this is My blood,* for you. For you, my child. For your life. To strengthen you. To save.

And **faith comes by hearing the Word of God**. Faith that says *Amen*! Which is the great Word of faith and worship. Amen. Truth. Your Word is truth. And the disciples - little faith, big faith, faith in the right place faith - ***worshiped Him*** - the God man, the God *in the flesh* man, the Son of God made man - right there ***in the boat***. And so do we. Here, in this boat, the Church.

So all the trials you're going through in your life, your weakness exposed, what the Lord sends in love that you cry out ***Lord! Save!*** . . . all are strengthening you for the biggest trial of all, when you're sinking into death. And the devil, the world, and your sinful nature will deceive you and mislead you, as they always do. But the Word of the Lord will not. So you will cry out ***Lord! Save!*** and He will. He promised. He's not going to let you go. It's why He came. And then <u>you</u> will worship Him - like the disciples, <u>*with*</u> the disciples! - and *with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.*

For, you see, the Lord doesn't just want you to get to the other end of this life. Many do that. Get through this life. And rather successfully. But Jesus wants more for you than just that. He wants <u>you</u>. Forever. And so He comes. For you.

So now, in this world and life, with its troubles and trials and struggles, with His Word, with such assurance, with such great and precious promises, with such a Saviour for you, maybe you can jump out in faith - not to walk on water, but for what He has called you to do: to *love one another, as He has loved you* (John 13:34). And if . . . when! . . . you begin to fail, you begin to sink, you know what to say. And He knows what to do.

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.