

Pentecost 10 Matt 14 “Why Do You Doubt?” August 9 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Have any of you heard of a man by the name of Brian Simo? He was a race car driver. And although most of you have probably never heard of him, there is one thing about him with which you are probably familiar. In 1985, he created the “No Fear” clothing line and found an idea that appealed to many Americans.

We have a lot of respect for bravery and for those who are willing to take challenging risks. But when does “No Fear” really mean “Darn Fool”? Last week, two teenagers tragically died in the Trinity River near Houston. A county sheriff’s deputy said, “Although the water appears to be very placid on the surface, immediately below the surface there is always a strong current that can pull a person downstream quickly.” The county also said the river bottom is covered with large holes. One minute, you could be standing in waist-deep water, but one step can drop you into a hole of 40 to 50 feet of swift water. Warning signs have been posted along the river’s edge, according to officials, but the signs are torn down and used for camp fires.

Today’s Gospel lesson teaches us that “No Fear” is not a decal or a T-shirt. It is not a spirited hope of getting lucky. It is not at all about taking foolish risks. The real “No Fear” lifestyle is found confession and repentance, in those, who like the Apostle Peter would say to Jesus, “Lord, Save me!”

Why do you doubt? We know why Job had his doubts. He had a legendary streak of personal disasters. Job’s three friends come to comfort him. But with friends like this, who needs enemies? Their discussion turns into a discussion of why this has happened to Job. His three friends basically have the same answer. Job must have done something to deserve this. There must be some form of universal justice. If terrible things happen to people, there must be a reason. God cannot be unjust. This must be justice.

Job, on the other hand, insists that he has not done anything to deserve all this. Now, this sounds rather arrogant to us, but it did not to the people of that time. It should not to us either. Job is simply stating, not that he has been perfect, but that he has repented of his sins and brought them to God as he was supposed to do. Job has heard and believed the words of the Lord and through the sacrificial system believes that his sins are forgiven. So why is he suffering? His friends say that Job has some un-repenting sin in his past and this is why he is suffering. Job says he has spoken the confession and made the required sacrifices. So, why are all these terrible things happening to him?

Job eventually says that he has a legitimate beef with God. He suggests that God has not been keeping his word in this regard. At this point God shows up and this is where our text for today is located. The final chapters of the middle section of Job have God challenging Job to stand up and ask his questions and level his charges against God. Job had reasons to doubt!

But God asks if Job was there when He made the world and if **he** defined its limits. Job was **not** there. He realizes his mistake and bows in humility before God. Why do bad things happen to good people? Job says that we really do not have a right to ask the question. God is God and He is so much bigger than you are. You really don't have the ability to comprehend His mind or His justice beyond what is revealed to you.

This text will not satisfy the unbeliever – that God is God and we need to let him be that, is hardly an answer to their formulation of the problem of evil. It will, however make sense and bolster the faith of the person who already believes. The person who is hurting and questioning God, needs love, not argument. We need, as Peter said, to be ready to give a reason for our hope, but giving a reason for our hope and argument are two different things.

This text enables us to proclaim a God of great power, danger, and glory to the people whom God leads to us. It is essential for the proclamation of the Gospel today. The Jesus who stretches His hand out to save the drowning Peter is the same God who stretched out the line and measured the earth like we might measure a piece of plywood when we build a dog house.

In our Gospel text, Jesus comes out to the disciples walking on the water. This is a fantastic sight. Matthew actually uses the word *phantasma*, which is often translated “ghost or spirit or specter.” Peter, the leader of the twelve, upon hearing the Master’s voice rises to the occasion. Is this an example of “No Fear”? Peter asks “If it is You... command me to come...” Peter is commanded, and incredibly he also steps out onto the water. But the ordeal is not over yet. Peter comes close to Jesus, but despite his close proximity is frightened by the strong wind and waves. He begins to doubt and to sink. It is then that Peter leaves behind the “No Fear” attitude and simply cries out to Jesus, “Lord, Save me.” “Immediately” Jesus reaches out to grab hold of his arm and saves him.

Jesus then urges the disciples not to be afraid but instead to have faith. They respond by worshiping Him as the Son of God. Now this last part is most important. Matthew chapters 11 to 16 form a unit in which Jesus repeatedly demonstrates that He is the Son of God. Notice that I said Jesus “demonstrates.” Doubters and skeptics love to point out that Jesus Himself rarely “said” He was the Son of God. But this is complete foolishness and self-inflicted ignorance. Jesus **showed** Himself to be the Son of God by walking on the water and stilling the storm. Who defies the Laws of Nature unless He is the Lord of Nature? Jesus also accepts the worship of the disciples.

What kind of fear have you been dealing with? Is it the fear of the unknown... what will happen with the economy, your job, your retirement? Is it the fear of change...a new school or a new job? Is it the fear of broken relationships or broken bodies? Are you worried about what lies ahead with your health? Perhaps it is the most basic fear of all: The fear of God’s judgment, the fear of trying to hide our sins from God? This world is full of the strong and fearful winds of trouble. Even those who stand side by side with Jesus may end up like Peter sinking in fear.

If this miracle of Jesus walking on the water teaches us anything, it teaches us that all human beings have their moments when fear will overwhelm us. All of us are weak by nature.

What we should not do is to try to rely only on ourselves to overcome the troubles of this world. Yes, get a good education; choose your friends wisely; live within your budget; live a healthy lifestyle. Yes to all those things. But more than that... Much more than that... Stay close to Jesus and cry out to Him, "Lord, Save me."

So, does Peter look like Job? Does he look like Job in his failure to look at God? Does he look for proof when he should have just listened to Jesus' words of comfort? Does he resemble Job in getting in over his head, literally over his head in the deep waters of the Sea of Galilee? Do we also get called out of the safety of our boats and find ourselves doing something we don't think we can do? Do we find ourselves, like Peter, standing amid the storms and winds of life and sinking beneath the surface of the water?

God doesn't leave Job in an ash heap, and Jesus doesn't leave Peter to sink beneath the waves, the results which both men really deserved, but which God remedied. The disciples do the only sensible thing and worship him, acclaiming him to be the Son of God, just like Job does the only sensible thing when God charged him to answer the questions of our OT text. He repents and submits to God.

Trust – Job and Matthew demand that we trust. Job leaves us intellectually humbled and we have to trust something. The question becomes, whose voice are we listening to? Our God is the only one who will solve our deepest problems and answer our deepest questions. Jesus calls us to trust, He extends his hand to Peter and pulls him up from the deep.

The disciples say, "Truly you are the Son of God." This is a pretty good thing for the sinner to confess about Jesus. Just remember Paul's words in the Epistle lesson where he says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Peter is bold to get out of the boat, but loses sight of Jesus and begins to sink. Jesus saves him then but questions him. Why did you doubt? Indeed, he **was** already walking on the water. How much more proof does one need?

But proof is not perhaps what we are lacking. Perhaps Jesus hits the nail on the head here. It is not a proof deficit, but a faith deficit.

Jesus tips his hand. He is God. The laws of nature don't apply to him. Or perhaps the forces of nature listen to him is a better way to say it. He can walk on the water, command the wind and waves, and even have another person walk on the water. This is not the work of just any man or some moralizing teacher. This is the work of the Lord of Nature, the Creator; it is the work of God. The disciples recognize that. Job recognized it. They bow down and worship. It is all one can do when in the presence of God. Ask Job. He had heard God with his ear, but now he beheld Him and repented.

Our eyes have a very difficult time staying focused on Christ. Our hearts cannot dwell on Him without distraction and temptation. I wish I were different, but I am not different. I cannot change who I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?

But God **is** here today. But he is not here to judge our sin. That happened long ago in the cross and in the suffering and death of Christ He served our punishment. He is not here to whip us into shape. He is here because He loves you and me. He delights in us and cares for us.

It is His mercy we desperately need and His love which sustains us today. So He comes in simple and humble things and people. Faith comes by hearing the halting words spoken by a flawed fellow human being. No angel will speak God's word to us today, He does it through a person. It is a gift. And through it we are counted as righteous and blameless.

God's loving presence in Christ conquers our fear and doubt. He calls us out of the boat, enabling faith to change who we are and what we are willing to do. If he calls us, we can get out of the boat! And should we fall or sink, He extends his hand to us and raises us up. At His word the storms cease for us. All things are subjected to his will and his will is for us and for our salvation.

Like Peter we often have taken our eyes off the author and perfecter of our faith. Doing so is fundamentally faithlessness, for to look at Him is to believe, just as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent on the pole and lived.

But even when our faith seems to fail us, He has never forgotten the promises He made in our Baptism. For the whole of our life he has reached out his hand and pulled us up and set us safe and dry in the boat.

Welcome to the Ark of God's Church that carries us through this fallen world to life everlasting! And may the Love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting.
Amen!