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Sermon for Sunday, August 07, 2011

Sermon Texts: Matthew 14: 22-33

Romans 9: 1-5

Sermon Title: "How to Walk on Troubled Water"

Sermon Topic: When faith is tested

Sermon Purpose: To teach that we need stronger faith, not a stronger Lord.

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Sermon Prayer: Loving Creator and Sustainer God, we have been called to take heart for Christ is with us in the Spirit. We are not to be afraid and to go when He calls. We have faith that He will not let us down, and we seek your continued guidance as we search Your Word and explore Your Will. Be with us and accept our service inspired by this hour. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

There is a time-proven story that says, "A hiker in the mountains suddenly felt the ground give way underneath him, and he began to fall. He caught hold of the strong branch of a tree, which was growing from the face of a cliff. This hiker found himself some fifty feet from the top of the cliff with no possible way of climbing up. Below him was a sheer drop of about five hundred feet. He couldn't climb up, and he had no way of safely getting down."

In his desperation, he began to shout, "Is there anybody up there?" No answer came, and he continued to shout, "Is there anybody up there?"

Then came a voice that said, "I'm up here. I'm God. Everything will be all right. Just let go, and you will fall safely to the ground. Just have faith and let yourself go."

The hiker was silent for several minutes, considered his options, and then he called out, "Is there anybody else up there?"

This hiker in our story was very much like the apostle Peter in our Gospel Lesson. Jesus had fed the five thousand, and the crowd wanted to make Jesus a king. If Jesus had allowed Himself to become that kind of king the Romans would have captured Him and put Him to death for starting a rebellion. Jesus told His disciples to get into a boat and sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, while he escaped from the crowd.

During the night, a storm came up and the disciples had difficulty keeping the boat afloat. Suddenly, they saw someone walking on the water toward them. At first, they thought it was a ghost. Then, Jesus spoke to them.

PETER CALLED OUT TO JESUS - asking that he be permitted to walk on the water to Jesus. Jesus called Peter to come, and as Peter began to walk on the water, he lost his faith. (Now, wouldn't you think that something like being able to walk on water - just because Jesus asked you to do so - would have strengthened Peter's faith? But the Scripture says Peter lost his faith.) He began to sink ... and Jesus came to Peter's rescue. Then, Jesus climbed into the boat, and He stilled the storm.

The incident of Jesus walking on the water catches the attention of many people. This passage has a significant lesson for Christians of any age, at any age, in any age.



First, notice the message that tells us "Christ stands with us in our times of difficulty." When the disciples were afraid their boat would **sink**, **Christ was there!** If you look at the whole ministry of Jesus, you'll discover that He had a way of being at the **very** place where He was **needed**. (I don't know of anyone **else** about whom that claim can be made. No government official, no physician, not even a **pastor** - no matter how hard they try - is able to have that statement made about them and be **totally true**.) I don't care **how** much they are respected.

(I know, from my own personal experience, that there have been times when I, myself, have not been able to be **right** there at the **very** minute of someone's need - due to **another's** pressing need elsewhere, or family needs, or vacation schedules, or even **church** schedules.)

ONLY our Lord Jesus Christ, our Father God, and the Holy Spirit - **no one else** - is able to be everywhere there is a need at one and the same time.

Christ promised that He'd **always** be with us when we need Him. His last words to His disciples, in Matthew, chapter 28, were: "I will be with you **always**, to the end of the age."

Christians have always understood that God in Christ stands with us in our times of difficulty. Perhaps the time of **greatest** difficulty for many people is when **death** comes to the family. Most pastors will tell you that if they use the twenty-third Psalm at a funeral, many of the congregation will join with them in repeating the words, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the **shadow** of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me..."

Christ **met** His disciples on those stormy waters of Galilee. Christ **reached** Peter as the disciple began to sink. Then, Jesus **stilled** the storm and brought the disciples safely to shore. We **can** find comfort and strength in the knowledge that Christ is **always** standing **with** us.

This incident teaches us that when we **fail**, it's often because of **our lack** of faith. Obviously, we **can** fail, particularly if we're trying to do what's **wrong** - or because of our own lack of determination. If we fail in doing what God has called us to do, we generally fail because of our lack of **faith**.

Peter **asked** to walk on the water. And, he was doing **fine**, until he became distracted by the storm going on around him. Peter became frightened by the situation **around** him, and he lost sight of his purpose. Then, he began to sink. I believe this incident is symbolic of **all** of life. We begin to **sink** when we lose our **faith**, or when we permit the events and distractions **around** us to shake (or to weaken) our faith.

This principle holds true in all of life. If we **really** believe in **what** we're doing and in **whom** we're following, we're very likely to succeed. If we **don't** believe in what we're doing and in whom we're following, **failure** is almost **certain**. This is true in courtship, in politics, in any **other** arena of our lives.

Finally, God in Christ **never deserts** us. It may have seemed to the **apostles** that Jesus sent them off in a boat into a **destructive storm**. They may have felt Christ **forgot** about them. However, they were **not** forgotten. Christ came to meet them.

Here, at LPC, we've come through many situations over the years. When the nation was in a **depression**, this congregation was **founded**. When the nation was at **war**, this congregation **grew**. When the nation was **attacked** and everyone in the community was **frightened**, this congregation opened its doors and its arms to those in need of **comfort** and **encouragement**. We **did** so because our faith was **strong** in Christ Jesus and we **obeyed** our Lord's command to care for his sheep.

We **still** have situations to face, as a nation and as a congregation. As long as our faith is strong and our focus is on the Lord, **we will not fail!**

Let us pray:

Son of God, in the midst of storm and strife, rough going and contrary winds, come to assure us of Your power and presence and purpose, that we may be saved to confess Your name and be faithful in following You, wherever You lead us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we ask it. Amen.

