

“Saving You from Yourself”

Matthew 14:22-33

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the rainforests of South and Central America, there's a lizard that has the ability to “walk on water” for short periods of time. In reality, it actually just moves its legs fast enough and has big enough feet that it basically works like a boat motor. Because of its ability to do this, it has earned itself the nickname, “The Jesus Lizard.” It uses this running on the surface of the water to evade predators and chase after insects for food. But its illusion is only temporary. It cannot truly “walk on water” because it eventually tires out and falls into the water. Those short bursts of speed come to an end, and it is nothing more than a simple lizard, frantically trying to get back to dry land. It certainly doesn't live up to its name.

In our text this morning, Jesus doesn't show up out on the water cruising the lake, legs flailing and spinning like a boat motor. In the midst of stormy weather, He appears simply walking on the sea, striking fear into the hearts of His disciples, for they feared they were seeing a ghost. The boat was a long way off, but they were making little to no headway because of the force of the waves as they traveled straight into the wind. After a long night battling the sea, you could see how they might be a bit delirious and start believing they see things they really don't. But there is no ghost out on the water, it is their Teacher, Jesus, calmly approaching as if walking on dry land, and He says to them in their fear, “ἐγώ εἰμι,” which means “I, I am.” There is no doubt with these words that it is indeed the Christ who has appeared out on the sea, and yet Peter still doubts, saying basically, “If that really is you, Lord, then tell me to do the same thing you are doing.” In his doubt, the Lord gave him the ability to walk out to Him, but when fear rose up within Peter and his reason took over, he began to sink. He could not save himself, and so he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Jesus does what He does and saves Peter from himself, from his unbelief in the face of fear and doubt. The Apostle wasn't saved from the raging sea because he tried hard enough to be like Jesus or because he wanted Jesus to save him badly enough. It was not the love of Peter for Jesus, but the love of Christ for him that saved him. In the same way, when you doubt and are stricken with fear, tempted by the evil one to abandon the faith which keeps you walking on the water, Jesus never leaves you nor forsakes you. When you choose the ways of the world and the advice of your sinful flesh, the Lord Jesus is right there by your side, saving you from yourself as He freely gives you the forgiveness of sins which He won for you upon the cross. There is always the hope of

salvation for those who have faith in Him, and it is that hope that sustains and guides you in this world of sin and despair.

The reality of your sinful flesh is something that all must bear as you walk this life. It is the greatest influence upon you because it appeals to your deepest desires of the heart, and as Jesus says, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander (Matt. 15:19).” The old adage to “just follow your heart” is utterly contrary to the truth of who you are as a sinful human being. If you follow your heart, you will be led into destruction and despair, ending up in the place Christ says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The sinful nature all mankind bears in this world is always present, always needing to be put down in favor of the new man that rises up in baptism. But that old man is cunning. He always seeks to overtake that new man by appealing to your heart to satisfy its debased desires that want nothing more than to drag you away from your Lord.

Bearing the weight of the sinful flesh is not easy, and it is something to which all people must either succumb or bear that burden in humility. And more often than not, you succumb to the will of your flesh, but that does not mean that you have no faith. It means that you are simply one like Peter, “O you of little faith.” Christ doesn’t take Peter’s moment of doubting and use it against him or guilt him into believing again. In his moment of weakness, the Lord of all picks him up out of the drowning cesspool of his fear and doubt, and he saves him from himself. He saves him from his sinful nature even though the Apostle chose to obey its guidance over keeping his eyes fixed on Christ. Thanks be to God that He is merciful in all things, showing grace to His people though none deserve it. The weakness of faith that each one of you have at many times in your life is not yours to overcome. There is no battle you must fight against the devil and your sinful flesh, because that battle has already been won for you. Jesus has already saved you from that weakness, for in His weakness He made us powerful, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:4, “For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God.”

Sin is no longer your master, but the devil is constantly prowling around you like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), waiting for that moment when he can tempt you and pull you back into its slavery. But like I just said, that daily struggle is not yours to fight and contend with the devil on your own. Because you, left to your own will, would never fight that battle. Your sinful flesh would convince you through your reason and feelings that you are better off giving in and following your heart down the rabbit hole of depravity. You don’t have to fight that battle because Jesus has already won the victory

over sin. He has already defeated the devil and his wiles and has given you all the credit for it. Despite your sinful nature being contrary to His will, He still imputes His righteousness to you by His grace alone. And He does that for each and every one of you in the waters of your baptisms.

At the font, He pulls you up out of that water which cleanses the fear and doubt of your sinful flesh, and He brings you into the baptismal boat of His Church as a new man. The regenerated inner being is constantly dwelling in you through the Spirit who has been given to you, and it is He who fights the daily battle against the devil's temptations in this world. Jesus' righteousness is now yours, and He quiets the waves and storms of this life that seek to tear you away from His grace and mercy. By His gracious gift of forgiveness, He takes your sinful flesh and covers it in the robe of His righteousness so that when your Father in heaven looks at you, He sees only His Son and not the sinful person you've always been. The inner being is aligned with God's will, and it guards and keeps you in the faith no matter the trials you face in this world. And that new man is strengthened for this daily struggle in the means of grace which God has given to His Church for the sake of His only begotten Son.

Baptism now saves you, as Peter says in his first epistle, and it is there that the stain of sin is washed from you and you are chosen by the Father as His adopted sons. You have the inheritance of Christ as one who is His own dear child, and nothing can snatch you out of His hand. He has given you His Holy Supper, the meal which brings you the medicine of immortality, to give you the forgiveness of your sins, everlasting life, and salvation. The very body and blood of Jesus are placed into your mouths to bring you the benefit of His death and resurrection, a death and resurrection that you have been baptized into by His grace. His suffering and death upon that accursed tree was done in order that you would be saved. Every part of that merciful act of God was done for you, to take your sins off of you and onto Himself to satisfy the wrath of God for unrighteousness. That is what you have in the fellowship of the Lord's table. One with each other, as the one body of Christ, you partake of the Lamb's high feast, bringing you to the true table in the house of your heavenly Father among the saints of all times and places.

The knowledge of this salvation does not come from your sinful flesh and its ability to reason it. You know the truth of your redemption because it has been revealed to you by the Lord Himself. In the words of Holy Scripture, you are shown the reality that you bear the sinful nature, and if left to its own devices, it would pull you down to the depths of hell. But Christ has saved you from that fate by the blood He shed upon the cross. His grace has been given and you have been declared justified—not guilty—in the

courtroom of the Lord. And for that, you give wondrous thanks to the Almighty God. You worship and praise Him, proclaiming as the disciples in the boat, “Truly you are the Son of God.” The glory of that revelation is unmatched, and it is that truth that gives you the hope of salvation that sustains you in the faith. You walk where the Lord bids you to go, knowing that He has already done the work of saving you from yourself—saving you from the sinful nature that seeks to condemn you.

Your hearts have been renewed and regenerated by His grace, and because of that you are able to confess through faith, “that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead...for with the heart one believes and is justified.” Peter’s heart believed, but that belief faltered because of his sinful flesh, and that is the burden all bear in this life. Christ saved Peter despite his little faith in that moment, and He has done the same for you. The salvation that He has given to you is yours already, and yet you hope for the fulfillment of that salvation when you reach His heavenly dwelling place. Everlasting life is the inheritance of everyone who believes in Jesus as the Son of God who has given His life in your place. You have everlasting life, for you will never die as one in whom Christ now dwells. Though your life will end here in this world, unless the Lord returns in glory before that time, your soul lives on as it awaits the day when it is reunited with your perfected body. That Day is surely drawing near, and the joy and perfection of heaven will be yours among the saints and angels for all eternity when He fulfills His promise to you as one who belongs to Him. Amen.