

“True and true” Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Do you ever struggle with what the Bible reveals to you? With all these many events which are hard to get your mind around. Like all these miracles. Many Christians have struggled with them.

It was the famous writer Mark Twain who said that “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.” Can you relate to that?

It’s true. We struggle. We often struggle especially with those events in the Bible that are clearly described. Words are clear. They are easy to understand. But the reality that they describe are hard to grasp.

Like today, – walking on the sea. Or the last Sunday, the feeding of the thousands. When we read these testimonies of eyewitnesses, we often picture Jesus as they saw Him, as one of us, – and this is what sometimes makes it hard to comprehend some of these events.

But who was this Jesus? We just said it in our confession of faith, in Luther’s explanation of the 2nd article of the Apostles’ Creed. I believe that Jesus is true ... God and that He is also true ... man.

Sorry, which of them? Both at the same time. How can this be? How are we supposed to comprehend it? The last week we reflected on Jesus healing many and then on top of that feeding the thousands in the desert. With five loaves and two fish! Do you remember, who else did something similar?

Who else fed multitudes when they were traveling through the desert? We have it recorded in the book of Exodus. Yes, it was the gracious God Yahweh Himself. So, what does the feeding of the thousands by Jesus tell us? Who was, who is this Jesus? Aren’t these events loud and clear in their message?

Today, we have another miracle that followed right after the feeding of the thousands. Jesus walking on the sea. “When evening came ... the boat was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night (between 3 and 6 in morning) Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.”

This wasn't the first time when He demonstrated His powers over the forces of creation. Earlier we can read about Jesus silencing the storm that threatened to sink their boat. Jesus was exhausted after healing many, and was dead tired asleep in the boat, when His disciple stressed woke Him up.

“Jesus, don't you care that we are perishing?” Still very tired, and obviously angry for being woken up Jesus said just two words: “Silence! Quiet!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm...

Who else had the same powers? To command the sea and the winds and, generally, the laws of creation? Again, we find it recorded in the book of Exodus. That was God Yahweh. The creator of heaven and earth.

Isaiah the prophet has recorded these words of the Lord: “Thus says Yahweh, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters [...] “Remember not the former things [...] Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa 43:16-19)

We need to have these words in mind when we meditate upon this event. What does this event, walking on the sea, tell us about Jesus? Who is He that even the laws of creation obey Him? Isn't that obvious...

But, we are very much like the disciples of Jesus. Even if they were together with Jesus, they still feared many things. We do too. They were worried about many things.

Whenever they faced something where they didn't know what to do, wherever they were not in control, they were worried, they were frightened. They were just like us. We are worried about many things, too.

For we often are not in control either. What do you fear about? What may happen after the coming plebiscite? What will happen after the coming synod? What will happen with our church, with our congregations?

How will I pay my bills? What happens if I won't have my income? How can I help my loved ones who are terminally sick, or who have lost someone? How will I live without people who mean so much to me?

How can we protect our children from this ever-degrading world? How can we pass on our faith? There are so many things to worry about. What are you worried about? What do you fear?

Whatever it is, this event with Jesus walking on the sea is recorded for your sake, to bring you a great comfort, to strengthen your faith, to strengthen your

trust in our Lord. To assure us again and again about Jesus' identity and what it means for us. He was and is true man, and He was and is true God.

Matthew has recorded the words of Jesus after His resurrection, which are as clear and as comforting as they could be. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Mat 28:18).

All authority! Not only over sicknesses. Not only over demons. Not only over wind or sea or water. Not only over the small and great problems of this world. Over everything, even over life and death, – all authority has been given to Jesus. He is in charge. He is in control. Everything belongs to Him.

Sometimes we, Christians, may be afraid facing hostility from this world. Guys, we don't live in enemy's territory. We shouldn't be afraid, we shouldn't worry, for it is Jesus Christ, who has received all authority. He is your God.

Think about the disciples' experience! Early morning, just before the dawn, you are in the middle of the sea, wind is strong, and waves are big. And then you see someone in darkness walking on the sea. Not the most peaceful picture, right? Is that a ghost? No, it's Jesus.

How can this be? It is really you, Jesus? Can I come to you? Like little child Peter asks Jesus: "Can I do what you do?" Like strong and loving Dad standing in the deep end of the pool may say to his little son "come, I'll catch you, you are safe with me", similarly Jesus says to Peter: "Come to me!"

Peter makes a few steps, but then he sees the sea and waves and winds. They all seem to be much more powerful than his teacher Jesus, and much more frightening. Peter gets scared, begins to sink and cries out: "Save me Lord!"

Immediately Jesus reaches to Peter, and takes hold of him. "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" There is no anger in Jesus' voice, there is brotherly love and compassion. "Brother, why did you doubt me?"

The same questions He probably asks us: "Why do you doubt me? Don't you trust that I will take care of you? Why are you so afraid and so worried about many things? Don't you trust that I have all authority and will hold you? Why do you doubt me?"

How often we are in situations where waves of this life seem to be too high, and winds too strong, and there is only darkness around, and Jesus seems to be too small, just like one of us. Then remember this event.

It doesn't matter how strong or how weak your faith is. We all are only children of little faith. What matters is that our faith is in Jesus. For He is the strong One. Regardless of His appearance in our human form. He is the Almighty One! There is no reason to doubt His abilities. He will hold you whatever happens.

But it is also comforting to remember that Jesus is also true man, one of us. He is not only the wholly other, the all-powerful, the eternal, the incomprehensible.

He is one of us. He understands us. He has experienced every bit of human existence. He knows what our lives in this age are like. He knows and understands all our struggles, all our worries. He understands them, and He cares for each one of you.

Thus, we have these two pictures, the almighty One and the gentle One, so different, but at the same time inseparably united in this one man, Jesus from Nazareth, our kind and loving Lord.

There is one last thing I wanted to mention. Our Christian story doesn't end with simply Jesus being true God and true man. Remember, what Isaiah recorded, – God is doing a new thing in Jesus. A marvelous thing.

Not only Jesus was true God and true man, but in Jesus from Nazareth divinity and humanity are inseparably joined together. What does this mean for us? That in Jesus God has accomplished, what Luther called 'the wonderful exchange'.

In Jesus Christ God took what belongs to fallen humanity, and in exchange gives us what belongs to divinity. He took our sinfulness, our mortality, our fears and worries, and in exchange He gives His holiness, eternal life, peace and joy. In Jesus, He gives all these wonderful gifts to humanity.

To everyone whom the Holy Spirit has united with Jesus. He gives these wonderful gifts to you. See, we not only have the all-powerful God and Protector, we not only have the God and Savior who understands us and holds us, we also have this generous and loving God, who desires to share His abundance with us. Everything that He has, He wants to share with you.

We may be perplexed reading the Bible. We may struggle to comprehend how all of this could have happened. We may be of little faith, when we struggle and fear and worry. That's fine. That's fine.

For you have Jesus, true God and true man, He is in control, He knows you, He has chosen you, He has claimed you, He cares for you, and He will never ever abandon you. Fear not you of little faith. He will hold you until we see Him.

Amen.