

“All-powerful and gentle.” 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

What are the storms around us right now? Where to begin? Will the Covid19 come back to South Australia and will we go into lockdown again? What will happen in Victoria? What will happen with Australian economy? With our livelihood? Will we destroy our future by acting in strange and shortsighted ways?

What is going to happen with the US? Yes, yes, they are sort of far from us, but what happens there doesn't stay there. They are the most powerful and influential country. What if those who seek to destroy the very foundations of Western civilizations, faith – family – flag, what if they come to power? We won't escape the domino effect.

What about China? We have witnessed the terrors of one anti-Christian empire of evil, the Soviet Union, now there is another, driven by the same anti-Christian ideologies, just much more sophisticated and with rapidly growing global ambitions? What may their worldwide ambitions mean for us?

These are just a few of the big storms that we are surrounded by now, but then for every one of us there are our smaller, but not less significant ones. Concerns about health, concerns about relationships, loneliness, concerns about loved ones, financial uncertainty, job insecurity, deep personal struggles and fears...

Such is the metaphorical sea across which we all travel. Where to find stability and security, where to find unshakable foundations? Our today's Gospel reading points to one such person, to the only such person – Jesus from Nazareth.

Today we read about the event which is famously known as Jesus walking on the water. As many other of Jesus' miracles this one has received its share of unbelief and ridicule. A few years ago, there was a public debate between two Oxford professors – Dr. Richard Dawkins, advocating for atheism, and Dr John Lennox, representing Christianity.

Trying to mock Dr Lennox, Richard Dawkins said: “And you know, he believes that Jesus walked on the water!” To which John Lennox smiling replied: “It doesn't create for me any difficulty to believe that Jesus walked on the water, what a big deal? For He is the One, who invented the water.” So true...

But now just for a while, let's try to imagine how the disciples of Jesus may have felt, and how much they were drawn to Jesus? Have you experienced a situation in your life, when you were listening to someone who spoke such words of wisdom, with such graciousness and compassion, that you just couldn't stop listening, that you wished that they would go on and on?

How much we want to remain in the presence of such people... Now add to it another dimensions. Imagine, that you witness with your own eyes that this person does something incredible. He heals everyone who is brought to Him.

Whatever the sickness. Even people who were born blind or deaf or cripple, they are healed, right away. What is going on? How is he doing it? What else can he do? And then you see him casting out unclean spirits. And then you witness how He raises someone who was already dead.

His enemies want to capture him, but he just walks away through their midst. They want to trick him with their questions, but his wisdom is so far more superior than theirs. Then you see him calming the storm; just saying a word and the winds and waves immediately obeying him. Are there any limits to his power?

Can he foretell the future? Yes... here it comes, the most important things that you need to know... Then you witness that the same person takes a few loaves of bread and a few fish and feeds with them thousands, and after everyone is satisfied, you can still gather several baskets with leftovers.

If we had the privilege to be among the disciples, how would we feel? Wouldn't we be drawn to Jesus like to some mysterious magnet? How is this all possible? How does He do it? Who is He?!

With our eyes we don't see anything else, but a human being, a man just like ourselves, but He keeps doing things which make us wonder what are the limits of His power and His wisdom? Are there any?

Just imagine how attracted to Him we would be? Just to be closer, just to witness something else, just to hear what He says... We can't be there, and unfortunately many who even identify as Christians have almost no interest in this Jesus, and even the most passionate among us... are often lukewarm and indifferent.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus had sent the disciple to the other side, He dismissed the crowds, then spent some time in prayer, conversing with His Father, and then was walking across the sea to get to His disciples.

And then Matthew records for us two scenes where we can see how wonderful our Jesus, our Lord and God is, how well He knows and understands us, He is not just all-powerful, He is also incredibly patient and gentle caring for us.

“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.”

Yes, they were terrified, who is this being that approaches them in the midst of the storm?! It's a ghost! Who wouldn't be scared?! The disciples certainly were. Terrified, puzzled about the identity of this being and scared to death. I think we can relate to their reaction quite well.

See what Jesus does right away; He speaks exactly the right words of comfort. “Don't be terrified, take heart! It is I, Jesus, your Master, your teacher, your Brother. It's me. Do not be afraid! I am coming to you. All is well.” Yes, He knows us and He cares for us. Jesus immediately saw the great perplexity among the disciples and spoke the balm of comfort and encouragement to them.

Then the second scene unfolds. **Peter responds: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”** It is hard to understand what was Peter thinking, if he was thinking... because what he asks doesn't make much sense.

“Lord, if it is you... command me to come to you on the water.” He was staring at Jesus, who being in a human form had full power and control over the forces and laws of creation, why would He still doubt that it was Jesus? More, why would he ask something so strange! And what if it wasn't Jesus... what's the thinking?

Perhaps some of our requests to Jesus are similarly unreasonable. Nevertheless, Jesus honors Peter's request. “Sure, Peter, come!” So, Peter gets out of the boat and indeed walks on the water and comes to Jesus.

But then, his attention turns away from Jesus, he looks at the wind, he looks at the waves, his heart shrinks and he starts to sink. The cry “Lord, save me!” probably comes from his very heart! **And Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

How strange were those disciples, and how strange are we in our unbelief! They had witnessed Jesus' limitless power and control over everything. But every time, when some new challenge came their way, they lost their heart. It seems like they forgot about Jesus, they forgot that He is with them.

Isn't this true with us? Sure, we haven't seen these manifestations of Jesus' supernatural, His divine power, but we know about them from the testimonies of eyewitnesses. More, the Holy Spirit Himself delivers the Gospel message to us and convinces us that it is true. There is nothing to fear when you are with Jesus.

But ... and you can speak for yourself, but I keep falling into this disbelief. It is true, Jesus has done things in my life, in our family, which should make me as confident and as trusting in Him and His care as possible.

But every time when I am faced with the scary reality of this world, my heart shrinks, and my trust and confidence in my Lord wavers. It is embarrassing. It is unreasonable. And it is offensive to our gracious Father and our Lord Jesus. Our unbelief. Our lack of trust. He doesn't deserve it.

Luckily for us, our today's Gospel comforts us with more good news. Jesus doesn't react to our unbelief. He doesn't ignore or push us away only because we fail to trust in Him. He comes to rescue us every time when we call upon Him.

“O, you of little faith, why do you doubt?” The Good News for us is that even little faith is enough for us to be heard. Most of us are not giants of faith and trust in our Lord, many of us often get scared when the frightening storms of this life threaten to swallow us and to drag us down into the deep.

Jesus knows it. And even if we often distrust Him, He comes to support us, to encourage us. Even if we are not drawn to Him as we should, He is drawn to us, to you, and even if our faith is like a smoldering wick, He is gentle with us.

Whatever storms come our way, whichever empires and ideologies rage, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales.” (Is 40:15) “For [even] the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” (Is 54:10)

So, we can be united as one with all the disciples of Jesus, to worship Him and say: **“Truly you are the Son of God”** ... our God and God for us.

Amen.