

## Pentecost 10 / August 9, 2020

### Matthew 14:33

***“And those in the boat worshipped Him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”***

What kind of faith do you have? Do you have faith that can move mountains, or are you like the man who assured Jesus he had faith, but then immediately added, *“but help my unbelief?”* God values nothing more highly than faith. In the letter to the Hebrews it says, *“faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.”* St. Paul said, *“We live by faith and not by sight.”* In His great chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13 St. Paul concluded saying, *“These three remain: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.”* Love is greater than faith because love is what faith clings to and believes. Love is the essence of God and so faith’s true object is God. Faith believes God’s promises, Faith believes God and trust’s His love. Faith will pass into sight when God’s promises are fulfilled at the revealing of Jesus. But in the meantime, God wants us to trust His promises and have faith in Jesus His Son.

In our lesson from Romans St. Paul assures us, no one who has faith in Jesus will be put to shame. He says, *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* He writes, *“faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ.”* But, how do we know we have faith? In his letter, St. James says that faith without works of love is dead. Works of love are a fruit of faith, but how can we know what kind of faith we have, whether it is a big faith or a little faith?

Abraham expressed his faith with many acts of love. He gave his nephew Lot the first choice of land to pasture his flocks. He rescued the King of Sodom from four kings and returned all his goods, taking nothing in return. These were fruits of a living faith that trusted God. But Abraham knew he had great faith, when the Lord asked him to sacrifice Isaac his son. When Abraham showed he had great faith, the angel of the Lord stopped him and said, *“Now I know that you trust me.”* Abraham knew it too!

What kind of faith did the disciples have in our gospel reading? Unlike the crowds and even the people of Jesus’ hometown, the disciples had faith in Jesus. They appreciated there was something special about him, although they couldn’t identify it clearly. This gospel is the second event involving Jesus and a storm on the Sea of Galilee. A few chapters earlier Jesus had been sleeping in the boat when *“there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves.”* The disciples were in great distress. They awoke Him saying, *“Save us Lord; we are perishing.”* As in our gospel Jesus rebuked them for their fear and smallness of faith, then he rebuked the winds and the sea and there was a great calm. The disciples marvelled and asked, *“what sort of man is this that even the wind and sea obey Him.”* At the end of our gospel they realize just what sort of man He is, that He is the Son of God and they worship Him. Their faith may have been small and weak, but it knew Jesus is the Son of God. Whether our faith is great or small, strong or weak, faith that is true believes Jesus is the Son of God and looks to Him for salvation!

Do you believe in ghosts? Neither do I, but sometimes I wonder. It was a dark and stormy night and I was alone in the house. I heard something rattle, then there was a soft hissing sound that got louder and louder. I assured myself there are no ghosts as I looked for the source of the sound, but nonetheless, the hair on my neck was standing. Put yourself in the place of the disciples on the sea of Galilee, in a boat on a dark and stormy night. You think you see the form of a man walking on the sea. What thoughts are going through your mind? How tall is the hair standing on the back of your neck? Now tell yourself again, *“there’s no such thing as ghosts.”*

Previously their faith was tested by the storm and fear of drowning. This time their faith was tested by fear of what was walking towards them on the sea. They cried out in fear, because they thought some phantom of the deep was about to swallow them up in doom, take them to the bottom of the sea and imprison them in Davey Jones’ locker. There is nothing like fear to reveal what we really believe!

What do you believe when you are afraid? What we are afraid of often depends on the situation we find ourselves in. Right now I’m not afraid of ghosts, but we’ll see what happens when it gets dark and starts to storm. The water was rough as the disciples made their way to the other side of the sea. The wind was against them and they had to strain at the oars, but this time they weren’t afraid of being swamped and drowning. When they saw Jesus, they were suddenly afraid of ghosts.

Jesus calmed their fears by identifying Himself. He said, *“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”* They took His words to heart so much so that not only were they no longer afraid, but Peter was emboldened to ask Jesus if he could join Him, walking on the waves. Would you be brave enough to ask if you could join the person you just thought was a ghost on the water? You can’t say Peter didn’t have faith, but just as quickly as one set of fears evaporated another set materialized. Peter saw the wind whipping the waves and he became afraid. He was even more afraid when he began to sink. He cried, *“Lord, save me!”* That’s when Peter saw Jesus best! When we see Jesus as our Saviour, we see Him best!

Fear can reveal things we shouldn’t believe, like ghosts. Fear can also show us what we should believe that Jesus is the Saviour. Fear revealed more than the disciples’ belief in ghosts and malevolent sea spirits. It also revealed the smallness of their faith in Jesus. They had faith, but it was tiny and needed to grow!

During their previous voyage with Jesus, the disciples’ small faith was revealed in their fear of the storm. They were afraid even though Jesus was with them in the boat. Their small faith was revealed again, when they wondered what sort of man could command the wind and the sea. Jesus challenged their fear, asking, *“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”* That’s a question we can ask ourselves when we are overcome by fear and in distress in the face of the storms of life. Jesus is with us, so then why are we afraid?

Why are we afraid? We are afraid, because fear is a basic response to danger. Fear alerts us to danger, so we can take defensive action. We have all seen gophers on the road. There are two kinds of gophers, fearful ones and ones without fear. The gophers without fear, stand in the road as the cars approach. The gophers that survive, head straight for the ditch. Fear has a place and serves a purpose. But in Christ, fear does not and should not overcome us. Fear alerts us to the danger of sin and our need for Jesus. But we don’t give in to fear, because Jesus is our Saviour! Jesus did many powerful, amazing signs in the presence of the disciples. He cast out evil spirits. He healed the sick. He made a paralyzed man whole. He fed a multitude of more than five thousand, from five loaves of bread and two fish. The disciples saw the miracles, but they didn’t fully understand. Their understanding needed to deepen and their faith needed to grow! They believed, but their faith was a small seed, barely germinated. It needed nourishment, so it could blossom in faithfulness.

Their understanding deepened and their faith grew when Jesus walked to them on the sea, calmed the wind and especially when He pulled Peter from the water and asked him, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt.”* The experience of fear and being saved, galvanized their faith and enlightened their understanding. Now they knew who He is and what He can do. Their immediate response is to worship him, saying, *“Truly, you are the Son of God.”* Jesus wants us to see He is the Son of God and believe He is our Saviour!

Someone once remarked, ‘drowning men see Him best.’ Peter saw Jesus in various ways as His disciple. When Jesus told him where to drop his nets for a catch of fish, Peter saw Him with fear. He said, *“Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man.”* His sin made him afraid. Peter was the first to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. But when Jesus said that as the Christ, He needed to go to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise; Peter vowed to prevent this from happening to Him. His preconceived notions about the Christ prevented him from seeing Jesus properly as the Christ. But Peter had faith! When Jesus told them that it was Him and not a ghost, Peter believed. Peter had faith to request to join Jesus on the water. Would you have that much faith? I wouldn’t, unless it was February and forty below! Peter saw Jesus properly as Lord, but then he looked away. Have you ever looked away from Jesus? Peter saw the wind whipping up the waves. He saw the boat rising and falling. Once again, he was afraid. His fears overcame him, he began to sink. Then he looked up, saw Jesus and cried *“Lord save me.”* When Peter saw Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, Peter saw Jesus best. When we see Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we see Him best. Jesus wants us to see Him as the Son of God, our Saviour and Lord. He wants us to look to Him in all things! The readings from Matthew these past Sundays have been leading us to see Jesus as Lord and believe in Him as Saviour! Now the disciples know who Jesus is and realize what that means. It means He is our God and Saviour, who shelters us during the storms of life. He is our Saviour and Lord, who rescues us from the sum of all fears, which is eternal death. Jesus reached out on the sea to save Peter from drowning. Jesus reaches out to us from the cross to save us from the drowning, which is the death of eternal separation from God. What about your fears? Do you have many fears? Are your fears small or big? What about your faith? Do you have a big faith, or a small faith? No matter the size of your fears or the size of your faith, look to Jesus as your God and Saviour! He gives us faith to believe. He has power to calm our fears. He gives us hope in all things. He is our God and Saviour. In Him we receive the peace of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life! Trust Him! He will do it!