

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.<sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,<sup>24</sup> but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.*

*<sup>25</sup> During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.<sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.*

*<sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*

*<sup>28</sup> “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”*

*<sup>29</sup> “Come,” he said.*

*Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.<sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”*

*<sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”*

*<sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.<sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (Matthew 14:22-33)*

### **Jesus Has Power**

What is power like? Consider this image of power: the quarterback of a high school football team is 6’2” and solid muscle. On a high school team, a kid that size can dominate the other kids simply by muscling over them. Another image of power might be a superpower deploying aircraft carriers and long range bombers and fighters. Very few countries can stand up to that kind of pounding. Or we might think of power in less physical terms, a CEO who can just terminate an entry level worker’s employment. In all those cases, someone has real power. Yet, in this world, power is almost always limited. That 6’2” quarterback gets sacked by a 6’3” defensive end. That superpower overwhelms its enemies, but then finds itself mired in a guerrilla war. That CEO has to deal with laws and union rules designed to keep him from arbitrarily letting people go. This morning, God gives us a different look at power. He shows us the power of Jesus, a power that has no limits, a power that God employs every day for our good.

#### **I.**

**Jesus has power over the things that terrify us.** His disciples were in trouble. They had taken a boat out onto the Sea of Galilee. Now the Sea of Galilee is small as far as seas go. But it’s known for being very stormy. When you’re out in a rowboat, even a rowboat big enough for twelve guys, a storm whipping up whitecaps and threatening to capsize you can be a very dangerous situation. What Jesus did for them teaches us a great deal about how he deals with the dangers and the fears that we face – the storms of life, if you will.

It was no accident that Jesus chose this kind of a situation to demonstrate his power. Again and again, the Old Testament describes God as the one who rules over the storms. When we think of the things that have happened just this past year, the hurricane that struck the east coast last week and did a minimum of \$10 billion worth of damage, the record number of tornadoes that struck the US this year – more 1200 have been confirmed, we can understand why people in ancient times were impressed by the power of storms. Since they lacked satellites and weather forecasting technology and never knew when a storm would come or how much damage it would do, we can understand why they were terrified of them. Storms are outside our control. But God does control them. Jesus demonstrated his power not only when he walked out on the waves in the middle of that storm but by what happened right at the end of the account. Matthew tells us that when Jesus got into the boat, the storm stopped. The disciples worshipped him and said, **“Truly, you are the Son of God.”** Only God can stop the storms and the Son of God did.

That is part of today’s lesson for us. And it’s not just for times when we’re out on a lake in a thunderstorm. Jesus’ power applies to all the terrible things that happen to us in life. Jesus’ power applies to everything that we fear is going to happen to us. What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of crime? Are you afraid of losing your job or your house? Are you afraid of that surgery that you have scheduled? Are you afraid of that bully at school or even at work who makes your life difficult?

All those things are real. But Jesus has power over all the things that terrify us. And who better to have that power? In this life, people who have power are often selfish and cruel. We Americans have a healthy fear of people having too much power because we understand what can happen if we can't protect ourselves from their greed or selfishness or stupidity. The Bible teaches that there are other powers out there that we can't see, powers that belong to the devil and his evil angels. But Jesus' power is greater.

That power belongs to the one who loves us and died for us. Jesus is the Son of God. He didn't have to be born of the Virgin Mary. He didn't have to live 33 years as a poor person in a primitive country. He didn't have to stretch out his arms and let Roman soldiers nail him to a cross. He didn't have to hang there and let his Father in heaven abandon him to the very pain of hell itself on that cross. No power in earth or heaven could have compelled Jesus to pay for our sins and die there. He chose to do that. He loved us that much. That is the power that raised him from the dead. That is the power that rules over our lives today. Jesus who loves you, who died for you, is in control of all things. All that he does is part of his plan to bring you home to heaven.

## II.

The account of Jesus walking on the water shows his power over the storms of our lives. But at the same time, this account shows how we Christians wrestle with those storms. In the end, it shows that even in our hearts, we are not alone. **Jesus has power over our fears and doubts.**

The disciples were in real danger. Most of them were experienced fishermen who understood exactly what could happen to them out there. As they battled the wind and the waves, a mile from shore, Jesus came to them walking on the surface of the water. Clearly, the ability to walk on water is a fantastic miracle. It shows that Jesus can change the laws of nature any time he wants to. But why did he do this? Why didn't he just stop the storm from shore? Jesus made them stay in the storm and he came to them. That's the way he often works in our lives. Certainly, there are times when God just puts an end to whatever is terrorizing us. We don't need that surgery. We find a new job and we don't have to worry about our house payments. But just as often, God lets the storm continue. We have to have the surgery. Sometimes, even after the surgery, we don't get better. Sometimes, he lets us lose the house and we have to struggle through the economic hurricane that follows, maybe for years.

But in all the things that terrify us, he comes to us. How does he come to us? In the gospel. Every time we hear about his love and his death and resurrection for us, Jesus comes to our hearts and strengthens our trust in him. He comes to us in communion. He gives us his body and blood to again forgive our sins and to strengthen our faith. He came to us on the day that we were baptized and he made a covenant with us that can never be broken. Every time we remember that baptism and that covenant, he comes to us. He comes to us when he sends our pastor to the hospital to pray with us and to assure us of his love before and after that surgery. He comes to us when we go to our pastor to talk about our fears in the midst of all that's scary and hard in our lives, because he calls our pastor to remind us of his love and his promises.

When he comes, he brings the solution to our fear: his love. Having our Savior with us in the storm reminds us of his promise that he will never leave us or forsake us. It reminds us that we have the power of the Son of God fighting for us and that gospel strengthens our trust in him. But sometimes, his love is hard for us to see. What did the disciples think when they saw Jesus walking on the water? They thought he was a ghost. Now that does not mean that ghosts are real. They had never seen anyone walk on water before so their superstitious minds went to a terrifying place and their fear only increased. Sometimes, fear is so deeply rooted in our hearts that even when God is working for our good, we can't see it. All we can see is what we're afraid of. Sometimes, we even make up things to be afraid of. We're so good at imagining what else could go wrong.

How did Jesus deal with the disciples' fear of ghosts? He said, **"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** He reminded them of all that their Savior was working, even in the thing they feared. God is with us in all that we face. Every hard and scary thing we face finally comes from him. It all comes for our good. We can't always see that, but it's always true.

Peter illustrates the way faith works in our hearts. He told Jesus, **"Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."** Now, I don't think this was a challenge for Jesus to prove it. After all, if Jesus had really been some kind of ghost, he could've told Peter to jump into the water and laughed while he drowned. I think rather, this was an expression of faith and hope. Peter asked for Jesus to lift him up in this impossible situation. And Jesus did. He told him to come and Peter began to walk on the water. Now, God does not promise us the ability to do miracles. Peter could not have done this miracle without Jesus' permission. But God does promise

that when we trust him in the hurricanes of this life, he will give peace and comfort because we will know that he is taking care of us.

Jesus is always there, working for our good. As long as Peter trusted him, he was fine. But what happened to Peter? Matthew tells us, **“When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”** Rather than focusing on Jesus and his promise, Peter couldn't help but see the real, physical danger. He was afraid and he doubted God's promise. So he began to sink. How often doesn't that happen to us, too? Logically speaking, we see no way out of our situation. We don't see how faith can make a bit of difference in the real life situation that we face. What pastor says in church is nice in there, but out here in real life, what practical good does it do? As our faith fails us, as doubt of God's love or God's power to help us increases, we sink. Emotionally, it gets harder and harder to face the storms of our lives. Spiritually, we're less and less able to trust in Christ. Finally, left to ourselves, our faith would die.

But Peter did what Christians do when doubt attacks our faith and does real damage to our lives: he cried out to Jesus for rescue and the Lord saved him. The Lord grabbed his hand and lifted him into the boat and the storm was over. But notice the rebuke: **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”** Peter had the promise of Jesus in the midst of a miracle to do a miracle for him. But his weak and sinful heart failed him. Every time doubt overwhelms our faith, we deserve this same rebuke. If we had a perfect faith, we'd never be afraid of anything. And I have to tell you, sometimes I'm so impressed with the faith of Christians as they face trials that would terrify me. I've been with many Christians as death has approached and again and again, I've seen them face it without a tremor because they trust in Jesus to bring them home. I've seen lots of Christians go to surgeries or face other crises with an unshakeable trust in their Savior. That is a wonderful gift of God.

But it is a gift of God. We don't have the strength in our sinful hearts to trust like that. Only Jesus can give us a faith like that. He does that, by rescuing us again and again, by comforting us with the message of his forgiveness, by reminding us of his love when all else seems lost. Every time we come here, he is preparing us for what still lies out there. Every time we come through the hardships of this life and can look back and see his blessings, he is saying, “See! I told you I would take care of you and I did!” That matters for all those times when we can't see his plan in the midst of our hurt and our fear. That matters for all those terrifying circumstances that come when we least expect them. Jesus loves us. He is our Savior. And he will be with us and strengthen us and get us home. He will conquer the doubts and fears of our hearts, even when we face the things that make life hardest here.

That's God's promise to you. The Son of God is the one making the promise. Jesus, who came into this world to suffer what we suffer and to conquer our sin and to die and rise and set us free from all that this world does to us. That is the final answer. He has conquered all that hurts us. He will take it all away. Not all in this life, but all in the life to come. Until that day comes, he has the power to build up our faith through the message of his love. Keep hearing that message. Amen.