

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

August 9, 2026

Text: Matthew 14:22-33

*“At Sea with Jesus”*

The last of the day's light was fading from the sky. What a day it had been! Jesus had turned five loaves of bread and two fish into a feast to feed a crowd of more than five thousand people, with leftovers that filled twelve baskets to spare! The people were happy; well fed they were. But the day was done. It was time for the crowds to return to their homes for the night. It also was time, Jesus decided, for His disciples to return to the boat in which they had sailed to this desolate place with Him, and to go to another place along the Galilean coast.

Meanwhile, Jesus climbed up a nearby mountain, and He prayed. Perhaps He thought of His cousin, John, who had baptized Him in the Jordan River. Earlier, in that same day, Jesus had heard the report of John's death, at the hands of King Herod. He might have prayed for the crowd who had heard His Word and had tasted and seen God's goodness in that miracle meal. He may have asked that they would be given faith to see the revelation of His divinity in the generous deed He had performed for them. He probably also prayed for His disciples, who were quite a way off in the middle of the lake, progressing painstakingly with the wind and waves opposing them.

Finishing His prayers, Jesus descended from the mountain. He walked to the seaside, and He just kept walking, walking on the water!

The night wore on, passing into the period of time known as the fourth watch (from about 3 to 6 am). The disciples, we can imagine, were tired after the long day of service with Jesus and their wind-whipped journey. Suddenly, one of them gasped. He saw something – no, someone - approaching them on the water. They stopped their rowing, and all of them stared into the darkness, not sure what was happening. One guessed that that a ghost was after them, and fear, like a wildfire, overwhelmed them.

Now, we know that it was Jesus, who approached their boat, walking on the water. But the disciples did not. They saw someone doing something that no human being can do. The sight of Jesus using His divine power terrified them. It's funny how, we sometimes think that if we could just see Jesus, as the disciples did, that it would be much easier for us to believe in Him. The disciples would set us straight on that, though. This miraculous sight of Jesus only paralyzed them with fear.

But Jesus called to them over waves. *"Take heart"* or "be of good courage." He identified Himself. *"It is I."* "I am not a ghost." He comforted them. *"Do not be afraid."* Whenever God says, "fear not," though His words take the form of a command, they promise us that God is with us and He for us. It really was Jesus, coming to them over the waves, trampling over them as steadily as you might hike over a rocky field. There was no need for them to be afraid. All was well.

All was well, but what was going on? What did Jesus' miraculous deed teach His disciples about their Lord? Peter wasn't going to wait to find out. The fisherman replied, "*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.*" Why did Peter ask Jesus to command him to walk with Him on the water of the lake? Was that what Jesus wanted him to do? He did permit Peter to try, but when, after a few wet steps, he noticed the speed of the wind swirling around him, poor old Peter, whose name means "rock", made just like one, and he began to sink.

Before the waves swallowed him, Peter cried out, "*Lord, save me!*" Instantly, Jesus answered his prayer. He pulled him from the water and carried him into the boat. Jesus also rebuked Peter: "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*"

Now here that we can easily misunderstand Jesus. For what doubt did Jesus chide Peter? Was it when he saw the wind and took his eyes off Jesus? Then, the focus of the story is on Peter and his weak faith. If he had just had more faith, then he could have water-walked all the way to the Lord. What a glory that would have been for Peter, right?

But wait a minute. Had Jesus really walk to them on the water to inspire His disciples to do likewise? No. Then why did He tell Peter to do so? Because He was patient with His bull-headed disciple. Let's take a another look at the exchange between Peter and Jesus.

The disciples in the boat were afraid at the sight of Jesus approaching them on the water. Jesus promised that *He* was with them and that they were safe. Why give them that promise? So that they could trust Him and not be afraid.

Did Peter get that? Look what he said: “*Lord, if it is you...*” Let’s stop right there. “*Lord, if it is you*”? Had Jesus not been clear? What had He just said? “*Take heart, it is I...*” Peter demanded a sign from Jesus to prove that His promise true. “[C]ommand me to come to you on the water.” Peter doubted Jesus’ promise that He was the One that they saw on the water.

We can be tempted to follow Peter’s example too. When we stand here and confess our sins to God and each other, what sort of words do I declare to you in response? I say, “Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” What are these words that we call the absolution? It is a promise of God’s grace and forgiveness because Jesus died for our sins.

What do we say when we hear the absolution? What we should say is simply, “Amen” to confess our trust in God’s promise of mercy. But have you ever caught yourself thinking or praying, “Lord, if you really do forgive me for all my sins, then why I am still tempted to sin. If You are my

Saviour, why is my job so frustrating? If you love me, why won't You heal me of this sickness? Please, just tell me what I have to do make things better."

*"Lord, command me to come to you on the water."* When it comes to God, we would rather have Him give us ten easy steps to Christian living than just His one promise of forgiveness and peace in His Son. It is the way of fallen, foolish humanity. Rules, commands, instructions and laws all tell us what we need to do in life. They feel so right to us because we all want to believe that we can make our own way through life, without God. How well did that work for good, old Peter? "Splish, splash, save me, Lord, I'm sinking!"

When Peter failed to fulfil the command he wanted from Jesus, he grasped for his only hope: *"Lord, save me!"* He fell back on the promise he had heard, that Jesus was there for him, and Peter trusted Jesus and asked for His help. As Jesus pulled Peter into the boat, he and his friends offered Jesus the true worship of a faithful confession: *"Truly you are the Son of God."*

Friends, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He came into our world to do for us what none of us could do for ourselves. We cannot deal with our sin. We try, but nothing we try works. Blaming others for our troubles is a smoke screen that soon blows away. Keeping laws and commands is a task that just never ends because we never get them right.

They keep us working, always working but never succeeding, like a hamster running on its wheel. Sin has cast our race into the middle of a deep, dark sea. There is no land in sight to which we can swim. But God has sent His Divine Son to us, walking on the water, to deliver to us His promise: "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid." "I know your sins against Me and each other, but I do not hold them against you because I have made them Mine. I carried them to their death when I died for you on the cross. Your sins, their guilt, and their condemnation are all dead, but I am alive forevermore. Sin can't condemn you anymore because I forgive you. My promise is trustworthy and true. You are free. No ghostly reminder of your sins should make you shake with fear. You have my promise: "It is I." Trust me and give praise to our Father, for His never-ending grace saves you. Rely on my promise, and freely give yourselves to your neighbours to love and to serve in My Name." Amen.