

,Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Job 38:4-18

Romans 10:5-17

Matthew 14:22-33

Where is He? Why are we out here? We are completely alone! Have you ever met an enemy that mercilessly put its boot on your throat? Self-pity and panic can erupt simultaneously. We've all battled loneliness. We've all battled spiritual fatigue and a sense of helplessness. It's uncomfortable, alarming, disconcerting. At low points, we sometimes think that the situation is endless, that the pain won't ever cease, that whatever enemy is exerting its power over us will forever mock us, forever assault us.

I have no idea what the disciples were saying to one another. Just hours before, they had seen the glory of God in the face of Christ. He fed a multitude with the meager resources of a boy's lunchbox (Matthew 14:17). Heaven's abundance broke out in a desolate place as five loaves and two fish fed 5,000 plus hungry humans (Matthew 14:21). The disciples saw it. The disciples were conduits for the miraculous feeding (Matthew 14:19). The disciples were overjoyed as Jesus' divinity was revealed for all to see. And now they were battered by wave and wind (Matthew 14:24). Drowning was a distinct possibility. Death; water and storm and death mocked them as they battled an enemy that couldn't care less about their feelings. Grizzled fishermen, the disciples knew the very real threat they faced. They were favored by the Lord's tender care, and the Lord was not at hand. Nor, they thought, would He be.

Have you been there? I have. There are a number of personal assets, personal character traits that are beneficial to us as we journey through life. Which ones would you put at the top of the list? My father stressed personal industry, a strong work ethic, as being an invaluable asset. Gratitude helps us notice and appreciate the many good things that God has given us. Where would you put gratitude on your list? Gratitude is a bulwark against a whiney disposition. Resilience keeps us from adopting a defeatist attitude, an Eeyore frame of mind. Would you put resilience near the top of character traits that serve us well? Where, on your list, would you put trust – trust in God? Does trust in God engender a calm spirit in adversity? Does trust in God engender a tireless sense of hope when the storm strikes? Does trust in God engender an unshakable confidence that, since the tomb is empty, no enemy rules over me?

I've never seen a strong man break. I've never seen a strong woman break. It happens. There's only so much we can take. The disciples were freaked out. It sounds as if they were at their breaking point. Granted, they had never seen this, a figure walking on the water. Their minds lurch toward the fantastic, the sinister, the folklore of the sea – it's a ghost! (Matthew 14:26). They were terrified. They cried out in fear. The fear was real and it swept them away. Into the midst of that storm came striding Him who gave the proud waves their border (Job 38:11). A voice, an anchor, a rock – Take courage, I AM, stop fearing (Matthew 14:27 – author's translation).

None of us are born with a strong work ethic; we have to learn it. Gratitude too is a learned frame of mind. What lessons have you learned in life; deep, character-building lessons? I suggest to you that some of the very best lessons come from enduring difficulty, come from

learning in and through adversity. Jesus *made* them get into the boat (Matthew 14:22). He had a plan. Trust was the night's agenda. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). Do you believe it? Where is He? Why are we out here? God allowed the storm. Jesus allowed them to endure a time of hardship. Not all of your pain is going to be whisked away simply because you are a believer. "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Jesus said that. There is, within us, a victory that surmounts all pain, all turmoil, all chaos. Jesus' death and resurrection is an "in you" reality. Our Lord and His life isn't distant, isn't far removed from your day-to-day encounters with sin and loss and shame and failure. Trust; the Lord Christ is most certainly teaching us. Learning His love makes us stronger.

Jesus knew that Peter was going to sink before the Lord told Peter to come. I have no idea what Peter had in mind when he asked (Matthew 14:28), but I do know that Peter was going to sink all along. And still the Lord says: "Come" (Matthew 14:29). Jesus is not afraid of Peter's doubt. Jesus is not troubled by Peter sinking. You and I are going to sink. Don't pretend that you won't. Some trouble will vex your heart, and you will give way to doubt, you will give way to pursuing your own agenda, give way to pursuing the world's faithless program, give way to pursuing your flesh's desire and you will sink. Christians feel it as it happens. Peter felt it. He was sinking. The situation was too threatening, too unsteady. Peter felt the wind. It wasn't fake. It was real. In Peter's eyes, Jesus diminished, the wind grew bigger and Peter sank. Can you relate?

Like us, Peter needed to learn. Do you suppose that the episode stuck with him? What part stuck with him? To be sure, Peter gets up on the sea. Some unknown interaction between the power of Christ's Word and Peter's faith, born from that Word, holds Peter on top of the water. Is that what he'll remember? At the end of this episode, Peter suffered a rebuke. It's a minor rebuke but I'm sure that it stung. "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31). Is the rebuke the thing that stuck with him? Strength incarnate reached out His hand and grabbed Peter as He was sinking. Peter was afraid and a hand laid hold of him, brought Peter into the boat. Trust has an object. Trust, the feeling of reliance, certainty – the hand of Christ laid hold of Peter as he was sinking. That's the physical reality that accompanied Jesus' words: "Take courage. I AM. Do not be afraid." I AM (Exodus 3:14). Jesus identified Himself as the God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God. The strong hand is the lesson. A pierced hand, strong to save, is our lesson.

It was the fourth watch of the night. Sometime between 3:00a.m. and 6:00a.m., deep into a night of futility and struggle, Jesus comes to the disciples. He will allow nothing to separate us from Him. He intentionally came into our chaos. And He does not keep a safe distance, protecting Himself from the assault of sin and death. He was vulnerable, laying aside His divine prerogatives. Soon the disciples would see Jesus crucified. It looks out of control. It looks as though all that is good and holy and just and blessed is lost, destroyed. Trust; what will you see as you age? What upheaval will we see? When our Lord was crucified, He was at work... within the chaos, in spite of the chaos, through the chaos. Our sin brought Him to that point. His love was the response. His love was the remedy. Christ's love was the power at work at Mt. Calvary, not the storm. Have you learned that lesson? Hasn't it been a joy to learn of His love, His presence, His hand grasping us as we sink?

Jesus pulled Peter into the boat, the storm ceased, and the disciples were in awe. Truly you are the Son of God (Matthew 14:33). The blood of the cross, the cruelty of Good Friday gave way to Easter and the resurrection. The storms of life give way to the peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). God pulls us in the boat of His church. In this place, the peace that flows from Christ's wounds invades your soul. You know that peace. He gives it to you as a resource with which to make your journey to heaven (John 16:33).

God loves the sinking. The Lord Christ gives grace to the broken hearted, the fearful, the troubled. He has seen you through one sinking after another. To one sinking brother, the risen King said this: "Put your finger here. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). Sinking Thomas saw the Savior and stopped doubting. He said: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Those are the words heard in this boat. My Lord and my God. The present Lord allows nothing to separate us from Him. We believe it. We trust Him more and more.