

WALKING ON WATER

Sermon 871

August 10, 2014

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

958th Week as Priest

784th Week at St Dunstan's

49th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Early that morning, Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. It was a miracle!

For my part, I am terrified of storms at sea. I don't even like boats. I get seasick on Lake Martin. And I could no more walk on water than I could fly to the moon.

The truth is that I am fragile and frail, and just a man. I can barely survive an average day without divine intervention. Sometimes, I manage to fool myself into believing that I am responsible for the triumphs of the day. But I am rarely capable of convincing myself that I am the captain of my own destiny, and the ruler of my

own life. And I think that's a blessing rather than a weakness.

The truth is that I am nearly nothing without Christ. He sustains me. He enlivens me. He strengthens my weak resolve. He carries me, wretched man that I am, through the successes and failures of an average day.

When I forget him, and his power to strengthen and to save, I determine that I myself must be the cause of my success. When in reality, it is he who pulls me back into the boat and calms my storms.

I am not alone in this sense: Modern men and women have convinced themselves that they are capable and self-sufficient, and need no help and nobody. With a proper diet, daily exercise, a good education, and the right amount of medication, they can do anything and they need no one and nobody else's help.

But this is simple foolery and self-delusion.

I often say, and firmly believe, that your life is of infinite importance to God. Yes, your life, and mine, and the life of every single person on the great round earth—

every life is unspeakably valuable and precious to the Creator of the Universe.

And at the same time, the very same ontological moment, we, in our sad selves, clothed in our human condition, recognize with keen insight and stark honesty that we are insignificant, like a single grain of sand on the beach or a molecule of water in a vast and turbulent ocean.

When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. This is the human condition—to catch a glimpse of our nobility, and at the same time, to be frightened out of our wits.

Then, immediately, Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." It's the same way that angels speak to shepherds, and women at the empty tomb: "Do not be afraid."

This manner of courage, to be able to stand unafraid in the presence of angels and men, is actually a matter of faith. It's a question of knowing who you are--and who and what you are not.

With experience, and a necessary amount of suffering, with every small triumph and each staggering defeat, with daily coping and survival, if we are paying attention to the Big Picture of Life, we come to realize (as the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher posited in the 19th Century) that we are *absolutely dependent upon the love of God*, and the grace of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

With God, and through God, and in God we are able to do great and holy things. But without this power to save, and our daily recognition of its source, we are most nearly and absolutely nothing more than cosmic dust, and a few gallons of warm water, all encased in a fragile shell. It's important, essential, and even healthy, to recognize what you are--and who and what you are not.

When he noticed the strong wind, Simon Peter became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Simon Peter thought he could walk on water, with God's help. But Simon Peter was a man, and only a man. He was fragile and frail, and just a man. Like you and me, he could make a good start, but he could not carry it through without holy inspiration, divine intervention, the direct help of Jesus Christ.

The most important part of the story of walking on water is not that Jesus could do it, but that Simon could not. Simon Peter forgot his Lord, and his power to strengthen and to save, and instead thought he must be the cause of his own success. But we know the truth: It was Jesus who pulled Simon back into the boat and calmed the storm. Now that, my friends, is a real miracle. **AMEN.**

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