

Sermon for August 13 2021 Pastor Alan Bray Matthew 14:22-33

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, the crucified and living Lord.
Amen

I'd like to begin this morning's sermon by sharing the words of Interim Pastor David Grant who is currently serving an ELCA congregation in Carver, Minnesota. Pastor Grant submitted the following summary of today's Gospel text from Matthew for Friday's "God Pause," a daily devotional from Luther Seminary. Pastor Grant writes:

"This great story draws the listener in so we are right there. We sense the feelings—the terror, fear, hopelessness and despair. We are the disciples in the boat. We are Peter. We are the lost ones. Yet the story is not about the disciples or Peter or us. It's about him—Jesus. Consider carefully and really hear the words. Notice the number of times the words "he" or "him" are used. Who is the story about? Not us. Not our feelings. The story is about Jesus. The story reveals this one as no ordinary man. This the THE Savior. Like the disciples, we have times of sheer terror and fear in our lives. With Peter, desperate for salvation, we reach out and cry out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus did. Jesus does. Jesus will. This is the good news. In Jesus, God reaches down into our world and saves us. With the disciples, let us fall down before Jesus and worship. Let us confess with our lips, "Truly this is the Son of God!"

Now, if I were a smart man and a savvy preacher, I'd sit down right now and let that little summary stand as our sermon. But, Pastor Grant's words strike an unusually resonant chord within me... and I can't sit down until I tell you how this morning's text grabs me.

Here's what I'm thinking. We live in scary times. Very scary times. And while I may be comparing apples to oranges with respect to what the disciples felt in their windswept boat, I somehow identify with what they were feeling in today's gospel story. The truth is that I'm filled with fear almost every time I listen to the evening news or read the morning paper.

- I'm frightened because we're on the brink of nuclear war with North Korea.

- I'm scared because we're at the point of "no return" with regard to the self-inflicted destruction of our environment.
- I'm overwhelmed by the frequency and ferocity of terrorism at the hands of ISIS, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Hamas, Boko Haram and a host of other quasi-religious fringe groups.
- I'm fearful because our country seems to have lost its moral compass as seen in its systemic racism, recent travel bans on Muslims, the rise of the alt-right movement, discrimination against transgendered service men and women, stepped-up persecution of undocumented immigrants and a host of other hot-button issues.
- I'm angry because the rich are getting so rich and the poor so poor that there may soon be no middle class at all.
- I'm horrified because loudmouth dictators and despots like Kim Jung Un, Vladimir Putin, Nicolas Marudo and others act and speak with tyrannical bluster and impunity.
- I'm tired of the unwillingness of Senators and Congress people to work across the aisle to solve such problems as health care coverage and gun violence.
- In addition to these things, I'm deeply concerned about my own mortality, my family's health, and my upcoming retirement.
- And to top it off, I'm petrified because the Minnesota Twins are again playing 500 baseball, and I know full well the other shoe will drop without warning.

Well, I could go, but you get the picture. There are a whole lot of things that make me shake in my boots. And I'd be willing to bet that most of you have a similar list of things which cause you to lose sleep at night and which leave you fearful and afraid.

For the sake of argument, I'd like to suggest that we are this morning's disciples, cowering and crying for mercy in the bowels of our storm-tossed boat. Like those disciples of old, we are as scared as we can be about the dangers all around us.

But, according to the story, and this is a big but...Jesus Christ, the living Son of Almighty God, comes to his disciples...to us...

- walking across the windswept waves,
- naming himself as the living “I AM,”
- calling us to be courageous,
- reaching out to us,
- rescuing us from the raging foam,
- climbing into the boat with us,
- and, miraculously, stilling the winds and calming the sea.

Dear friends, lest you think otherwise, this is more than a fanciful story...more than an instructive metaphor...more than some made-up dream of wishful thinking from an age long past.

At the core of this story is the gospel truth...that Jesus Christ is alive and present in the 21st century bringing hope, confidence and resolve to people of faith. Jesus Christ is our greatest resource in times of terror and hopelessness. But sadly, a resource all too often ignored, underestimated, laughed away or forgotten by Christians such as you and me. Like the disciples in Matthew’s story, we are often the ones who have taken our eyes off of the Christ and given our attention to the raging waves around us.

The Good News is that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, NEVER takes his eyes off of us. We are NEVER outside the protective comfort of his arms and promises. Jesus Christ, past, present and future, is the great “I AM.” Jesus is the life of the world, the hope for tomorrow, the shepherd of the sheep, the door to God’s preferred future, and the vine that gives life to its branches.

Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Oh yes, our fears, our anxieties and our doubts are real, no question. But Jesus Christ has come to rescue us...to invigorate us, to calm our nerves, to energize our resistance, to stimulate our resourcefulness, to solidify our resolve, to deepen our compassion, to bring us wisdom, to give us hope and to ground us in love.

People of God, be of good cheer. Jesus is Lord!

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our living Lord and Savior. Amen

