

**The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**  
August 31, 2014  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 14:22-33

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." (NIV)*

"You're in good hands!" This is the kind of insurance that Allstate advertises to offer. They promise they will take care of you. They assure you that you can trust they will be there for you when you need them. Isn't the picture of being in good hands a comforting thing? If you dropped any children off at elementary school I'm sure you caught plenty of little boys and girls holding on tightly to the hand of mom or dad as they made their way into their new classroom for the first time. There is no question a child feels much safer when dad or moms big and loving hands tightly hold them.

Did you also know God uses this same picture? We hear Him say through Isaiah "***I will take hold of your hand.***" (42) We listen to psalmists say things like "***You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.***" (73) And in another place: "***My times are in your hands.***" (31) The Scriptures teach us truths such the hands of our God are strong and mighty, that His arm is not too short to save, and that He has even engraved us on the palms of His hands. Today, we have a real life example of the Lord's saving hand as He reaches out and saves a sinking disciple. Today, we have a real life example to assure us there will be loving hands to hold onto us and guide us through every storm of life. Take comfort and be assured today, dear friends, in this wonderful lesson from God's Word that you are: **Safely in His Hands.**

The Lord's powerful hands had just supplied enough food for 5000 men, along with all the women and children there, from only five loaves of bread and two small fish. Witnessing this great miracle the people said, "***Surely this is the Prophet who is come into the world.***" Misunderstanding the purpose for which Jesus came they tried to "***make him king by force,***" wanting Him to be their earthly bread king. (John 6) Even Jesus' twelve disciples had been caught up in this excitement. Mark's gospel tells us that after this miracle on the water they "***were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.***" (6)

Jesus recognizes the situation and orders the disciples to get into a boat and go across the sea while he dismisses the crowd. Jesus sees a trip across the sea at night as less of a danger than the crowd which wants to make Him an earthly king. Not only did He protect the disciples, but Jesus also has to fight a real temptation here. Who wouldn't want to be crowned king by the crowds? This is a similar temptation Satan used earlier telling Jesus: "*If only you would bow to me all these kingdoms will be yours.*" Thankfully Jesus, "***who was tempted in every way, just as we are***" (Hebrews 4) remained without sin. In fact, Jesus gives us another perfect example of what to do in the face of crisis and temptation. After separating His disciples from the crowd and dismissing the people, "***he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.***"

After being alone in prayer, Jesus goes to rejoin His disciples. The only problem is that they are a "***considerable distance from land***" - John's gospel says "***three or three and a half miles.***" Another obstacle is there is a storm. The disciples' boat is being "***buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.***" Mark adds: "***Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars.***" The disciples toil to move the boat forward. But Mark includes their ray of hope: the Lord sees their struggle. The Lord, the One who told them to cross the sea, is not about to leave them on their own. Even though the disciples did not know it, they remained safely in His hands. "***During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.***"

The fourth watch is between 3 and 6 in the morning - so it had been at least nine hours from evening - the first watch when the disciples had set out. Try to put yourselves in the shoes of these disciples. They had been worn out and in need of rest after several long days of missionary work. They leave for the eastern shore to a desert place to find rest, but great crowds surround them and they end up with the work of feeding five thousand. At evening they are sent back home, tired as they were. Instead of a speedy trip across the lake, they are held up by this windstorm, and toil all night rowing against it. No rest, no sleep for them. Now, they look and see something that they had never even heard of in the wildest of fishermen tales! Someone is walking on the water! "***When the disciples saw him walking on a lake they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.***" First the storm and now they see someone walking on water. I think even the calmest of us would have our cages rattled a bit at this point as well.

But then the disciples hear His voice. They hear the words of Jesus. He says: "***Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.***" There is a lot jammed into those few words! "***Take courage!... It is I...Don't be afraid.***" In the storms of life how often haven't we needed to hear these words: "***Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.***" Jesus was with them. Jesus is with us. We don't need to fear. We are safely in His arms.

This is all Peter needs to know. He says: "***Lord, tell me to come to you on the water.***" Jesus says: "***Come.***" "***Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.***" At Jesus' command Peter comes and miraculously Jesus enables him to walk on the water. But did you catch what happens? Peter starts to feel the strong wind and to see the big waves. He takes His eyes off of Jesus. Once again, he is afraid. He is filled with doubt rather than faith and He begins to sink. At this point it might be easy for us to join Jesus in rebuking Peter and asking "***You of little faith, why did you doubt?***" Yet, perhaps we should consider the words of Prof. Balge. He says before we wag an accusing finger at Peter, I should pause and ask myself, "***Have I ever walked on water, even briefly?***" How many far less miraculous promises of God have we doubted? How many times do we focus on the wind and the waves around us and forget Jesus is with us? All too often we take our eyes off of Jesus and His Word and we too begin to sink in our own doubt and despair. It is at those times we need to cry out like the apostle Peter, "***Lord save me!***"

***“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.”*** Jesus doesn’t wave to Peter and say “good-bye O you of little faith” and just let Peter sink into the bottom of the sea. No immediately Jesus reaches out His strong and loving hand to save Peter. Once again this disciple was safely in His hands. ***“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”*** How often doesn’t Jesus do the same for us? Again and again in my life Jesus reaches out His hand to pull me up. When we are afraid, when we are frustrated, when we are filled with doubt, when we start to lose our way, Jesus reaches out with His Word and promises and brings us back safely to Him.

I just love this story. And to tell you the honest truth I really needed to hear this Word of God today. To put it mildly, it was a rough week for the Wilke family. As you know last week we went to drop our daughter Katie off at Prep school in Wisconsin where she is now living in the dorm. It is the hardest thing Lisa and I have ever done. Our eyes were filled with tears almost all the back to Kentucky. It is still difficult to be separated from her. The only thing that is getting us through this, not having our baby girl with us, is God’s promise that she is safely in His hands. In every storm of life, in every change and challenge, Jesus is with her and with us. Jesus is here to say: ***“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*** Jesus is here to reach out His hand and pull us back up when we start to sink.

This time Jesus’ disciples get it right when they worship Jesus and say: ***“Truly you are the Son of God.”*** This is who hold us safely in His hands. We are in the hands of the Son of God who became fully human and a true man with real hands for us. We are in the hands of the Savior who, in love, opened up His hands so that they could be pierced through by large nails. He opened up His hands so that He could be nailed to a cross with our sin. He opened up His hands to suffering and death to save us. He showed Himself to be the Son of God by single-handedly defeating death and the devil and giving proof of it by His resurrection from the dead.

Are you in good hands? I would say so, wouldn’t you? What another reminder we have today that no matter what storms come our way we are always safely in His hands! I pray that we thank God for this. I pray we take comfort in this. I pray we never take our eyes off of Jesus and forget this beautiful truth until the day we will be able to confidently say ***“into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** Amen.