

**Matthew 14:22-33 – (EHV)**

**Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. <sup>24</sup> By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it. <sup>25</sup> In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, “It’s a ghost!” <sup>27</sup> But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, “Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid.”**

**<sup>28</sup> Peter answered him and said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Come!” Peter stepped down from the boat, walked on the water, and went toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid. As he began to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” <sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” <sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. <sup>33</sup> Those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God!”**

Dear fellow children of God,

What happens if you’re playing baseball or softball and don’t heed the coach’s advice to keep your eye on the ball? What happens if you’re driving and get distracted by your phone? What happens if you’re hammering in nails and lose focus on the task? In any of those cases you’re likely to mess up what you’re doing at best, and at worst could actually get pretty hurt. When you’re dealing with a dangerous task, whether you’re working with a tool or driving a car, you want to stay focused so that you can do the job well and safely.

Jesus had a powerful lesson to teach his disciples that night on the Sea of Galilee. Your faith, like every other component of your life, needs focus. Without focus, faith gets mixed up, distorted or at worst lost. Faith’s most basic definition is trust, but if your trust is scattered all over the place, it doesn’t always trust in anyone or anything. Jesus urges us and the Holy Spirit helps us to:

**Sermon Theme: Keep Your Faith Focused On Jesus**

- 1. Watch Out For Distractions**
- 2. Jesus Alone Can Save Us**

Our text for today follows right on the heels of Jesus’ great miracle of feeding the 5000. At the time of the feeding of the 5000, the people wanted to make Jesus their bread-king or earthly king. Someone who could take care of every one of their earthly problems. Jesus knew this wasn’t his purpose for coming to earth. Jesus knew also that he needed to do some more teaching about who he was and why he was here. The first thing that Jesus did was to separate his disciples from the temptations of these people. He did this as he, **“Immediately Jesus urged the disciples to get into the boat and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed the crowd, he went up onto the mountain by himself to pray”** Jesus would later catch up to them and see if they truly understood.

Aren’t there times in our lives where Jesus comes and intervenes or puts things off in order to give us

some time to see the whole picture? Maybe we wanted to buy something or go somewhere, but God knew that this thing or this place would be a temptation to our faith. For this reason he may have closed the door to buying this particular item or going to this particular place. He always has our best interest in place and will use all of his power to make sure that we remain true to him.

Jesus also gave us a reassurance in the fact that he took time for private prayer. What do you imagine Jesus prayed for while on the mountain? Did he pray for the people so that their false ideas may be removed? Did he pray for the disciples that their faith may be strengthened? Did he pray for safe travels for all the peoples who had gathered to hear him speak and who witnessed his miracle? I'm sure he prayed for all these people and all these situations and a whole lot more. It was his concern that God gives strength to his people and gives strength to him as he continued to preach the saving truth.

While the disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee a storm arose. It tells us, **“By then the boat was quite a distance from shore, being pounded by the waves because the wind was against it.”** In fact it tells us that the disciples had been in the boat for almost 12 hours and had traveled only a few miles. Imagine the feeling that these men were experiencing. The fear of being surrounded by wind and waves. Even for experienced fishermen this must have been terrifying. At this point they look out on the horizon and see a figure coming towards them. The wind and waves made them afraid enough, and on top of that you see someone approaching your boat. Listen to the Disciples!, **“In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and cried out in fear, “It’s a ghost!”** They were not just afraid, but they were terrified. They were so afraid that they cried out in fear. This is the kind of fear where your stomach is right up in your throat and you are sweating uncontrollably.

As we go through life we realize that there is much to make us afraid. We are afraid of earthly things like fire, darkness and storms. We are afraid of everyday things like the safety of our children, our financial future and concern over our health. But how many of us are truly afraid of the devil and our sinfulness. As we look at our hearts we realize that the devil is in a terrible fight to win our souls to his side. As we look at our lives, we see the many times where our sinful nature has won the battle and we have fallen short of perfection. When we look at our sinful nature and all our sins and the powerful evil One, the Devil, then we realize that I need help. I have fallen short of God's perfection. God doesn't condone my sinfulness. We can't live our lives with an intent to keep on sinning, because we know that God will forgive all my sins anyway. As we look at our spiritual condition, we need to be deathly afraid of the consequences of those sins. We need to be very afraid of the eternal condemnation our sins deserve.

Just as the disciples had reached the peak of their fear, Jesus calls out to reassure them, **“But Jesus spoke to them at once, saying, “Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid.”** Imagine the relief that must have come when the disciples heard the familiar voice of their Master. Imagine as Jesus in his gentle yet firm voice reassured them that that it was going to be alright. He told them to not be afraid. Their faith went from weak to stronger and more assured. Peter in all of his usual hastiness, asked Jesus to invite him out to the water, **“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. Jesus said, “Come!”**

You can see in your mind's eye this picture of Peter crawling out of the boat and walking on water, firm as ground, toward Jesus. He walked right up to him, focused on Jesus, all is well. He trusts Jesus to make this happen; his faith is focused on Jesus and on him only. After all, here is Peter's God and Savior! Here is the one who can do anything! What does Peter have to be afraid of when Jesus is with him? But then we're told that Peter saw the wind. He took his eyes off his Savior, let his faith lose focus, and he

looked around him. And what a ridiculous scene he saw! He was standing on the water in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a storm! What was he doing? Why was he there? He was going to get hurt, or worse, die! These waves were too much; the wind was too strong! What was going to happen to him?! He began to sink, began to drown.

I identify with Peter a lot and maybe you do too. I don't always trust that God's will is being done and that he's working everything that happens for my eternal good. I think that my own strength needs to protect me or work things out for me, and then I don't know what to do when my own strength is shown to be weak and my power proved to be lacking. There are storms on this sea of life that you and I can't deal with. Those waves are crashing in and threatening to drown us! Perhaps at those times, you and I, like Peter, lose the focus of our faith.

We often lose the focus of our faith, when we're more focused on the problems than the solution. It is easy to stay focused on Jesus, until the troubles and worries of this life begin to kick in. We might justify our sins by saying, "I would be fine, if I didn't have all these things to worry about. I would follow Jesus' promises more, if life wasn't so hard and the distractions of the world weren't so great." That is why we need to cry out just as Peter did. Each and every time we fail, we need to ask Jesus to save us. And notice that we aren't in anyway saving ourselves. There is no "Me" or "I" in this saving process. Jesus alone has the power to save us and to bring us the complete assurance and comfort that all will work out.

Notice what Jesus did. He didn't let Peter drown and say, "Oops, you really should have trusted me. Sorry." Nor did he even let him "suffer" a little bit in that water before ultimately rescuing him. It, says, **"Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. There is a slight reprimand on Jesus part, **"Why did you doubt?"** but its tone is one not of scolding but encouragement: "Why doubt? Remember I can always take care of you."

As we sink into our own seas, Jesus grabs us by the hand. As he pulls us up we're reminded that while we have lost focus, he has not. And as he saves us we're reminded that there is forgiveness. We've been forgiven for those times we have not trusted him. **"You of little faith,"** he says to each of us, Why do you doubt my love for you? Why do you doubt my ability to protect and help you? Why do you doubt my forgiveness? And we have no answer because there is no reason to doubt. Jesus is faithful in his love and Jesus is faithful in his ability to protect us.

Are sins plaguing you? Focus on your Savior who destroyed them. Are problems weighing you down? Focus on your Savior, who takes care of all things for you. Are you worried about the future? Focus on your Savior, who will be there to help you, no matter what storms may arise. Find that focus in his Word and in the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper, which remind us of the unending love and forgiveness for us all. Lord, help us to keep our focus on you today, tomorrow, and forever.

The disciples witnessed the power of Jesus and saw all that he could do. But we do not need a miracle to make us trust in Jesus and his saving power. We have the promise that Jesus died and rose again, and that Jesus has the power to take away all of our fears, both physically and above all spiritually. Jesus gives us the power to stand firm, but even greater he gives us the saving hand that will lead us through our earthly doubts and fears to our final home in heaven. Sure there will be distractions and fears along the way. We would be lying to ourselves and God, if we said we never doubted or worried. But we have something to take all of this away, and this hope comes in the name of our risen Lord and Savior. Amen.