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**9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2020**  
*1 Corinthians 3:9-17 & Matthew 14:22-34*

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Sometimes we deceive ourselves into thinking we can do everything alone and live as we please without serious consequences. Self-reliance, independence, and freedom are important, but they have their limits in difficult times. More important is our relationship with God if we are to flourish as His beloved sons and daughters.

So, Jesus' parable in our Gospel reading this morning assures us we can rely on God to be with us in difficult times. However, it does not mean our difficulties vanish, but that we can trust God through faith to do what is right for each of us. (Matthew 14: 22-34)

You may have noticed that Jesus retreated to the mountain after He sent His disciples out into the raging sea. The mountain in Matthew's Gospel is a place for encountering God, where Jesus goes to pray. Twice, the writer states that Jesus is by himself (v. 23). While Jesus is praying, the disciples find themselves in danger on the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples are far from land, and huge waves and high winds are beating the boat. If you recall, Jesus calmed the seas in Matthew 8: 23-27. In that story, Jesus led the disciples into the boat and stayed with them, even though he was asleep. In our passage for today, however, the disciples do not have the luxury of having Jesus with them. He is away on the mountain top praying.

Meanwhile, the disciples have been struggling to keep the boat afloat. Then, in the early morning hours, Jesus appears while it is still dark. But the disciples do not immediately recognize Him with the waves and water surging around them. They are fearful and tired from battling the storm all night, and mistakenly think they see a ghost. When Jesus notices their fear, He cries out, "Take heart; it is I; have no fear" v 27.

Peter asks Jesus if it is really, He. Jesus asks Peter to walk on water to Him. Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water. The Gospel does not say Jesus calmed the seas to make it easier for Peter. As he miraculously walked on water with Jesus, he had forgotten the relationship he had with the Lord. Peter turned his trust away from the One Who enabled him to walk on the water and focused on the wind and the waves. The distraction weakened his faith and caused him to sink. It had not fallen into Peter's mind the walk on the waves was possible purely because the Son of God had enabled him to do so. As he turned away from trusting the Lord and relied only on himself, he sank like a stone.

It was only Jesus' presence and His voice that made it possible for Peter to take any steps on the water. We should not chastise Peter too much for what we see as his lack of faith. Yet, He was brave enough to get out of the boat. Many of us shy away from the chaos of the world, even when we "know" that God is with us. Peter trusted and tried the impossible. Many just go along for the ride and stay safe "in the boat," which we call life. Peter walked on water to Jesus during the storm. Is Peter a hero? Hardly! His faith wavered, and he would have drowned if it had not been for Jesus.

Often, it is during the most challenging times when we can recognize Jesus. When our lives are moving along smoothly, and we are distracted by all that life offers us, we often forget about God and Jesus. However, when the storms of life come, and they do come to all of us, we become afraid and call out for God's help.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) is unpredictable, can kill, and should be of great concern to just about every human on the planet. Fear has gripped many today because of this pandemic, some more than others. It may seem doubtful the virus could bring about a positive change. Yet, disasters have a weird way of making things better, once we eliminate the initial problem.

During this pandemic, it is an excellent time to reflect on who we are and what is most important in our lives. Instead of dwelling on what might happen, focus on the present. Give more care mainly to the here and now and enjoying the moment, regardless of the virus or what might come next. And put your faith in God.

Most of us spend our time and energy trying to establish a stable, safe, and secure life for ourselves and those we love. On one level, there is nothing wrong with this. God wants us to feel safe and secure. However, the key is where and whom do we trust for our safety. Some think that only by accumulating material things our lives are made comfortable and safe. Material possessions may make our lives comfortable for a time, but they hardly guarantee our safety. When life's difficulties appear, we can only buy so many insurance policies to protect us. We often confuse life's comfort with abundant life. When an acute illness or death of a loved one happens, all the insurance policies we have will not compensate for these tragedies. We are only truly "safe" when we realize how much we depend on God.

We also need to remember that Jesus first went to the mountaintop to pray to God. By His relationship with His Father through prayer, Jesus did the miraculous. Jesus did not depend upon His strength. He told us often in the scriptures it is God, not He, with the power. God's power is the focus of the calming of the sea. It is not Jesus directly that we must look at first. We need to look at what God can do through the relationship He has with His Son, Jesus. The power is from God, and it is from cultivating a relationship with God through prayer and worship that Jesus can act. Prayer is how to bring about and sustain a living relationship with God. God wants us to trust Him and believe He hears our prayers. Knowing that God hears our prayers will enable us to live our lives with courage, faith, and hope. God is always there, sometimes to encourage us to overcome our fears, sending us out ahead and grabbing us in forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

We often pray for things we think we should receive. We know that God hears all prayers. He always knows what is best for us in this life and the next, even when we feel He did not answer our prayers. But He is with us, in happiness and sorrow. So, let us pray wisely and remember, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Amen!