

"Walking on Water"

Matthew 14:22-33

August 10, 2008

The Gospel text this week follows immediately on the heels of the feeding of the 5000 which we talked about last week. It was interesting that as I was doing so reading this week, I ran across an article that was entitled: "Why Jesus Shouldn't Have Fed the 5,000". It said: "Apparently, biblical scholars funded exclusively by the Christian Coalition now feel that, for their own good, the 5,000 should have worked for that food instead of depending on an overly generous Messiah. Scholars are convinced that the disciples probably tried to stop Jesus from creating a culture of welfare among his followers. 'Oh sure, Master. Today you feed 5,000, then what? Feed 10,000 tomorrow? Look, just give the kid back his lunch, make your speech, and let's get out of here.'

It really is a part of our mind set. We don't want people to become too dependant on someone else. If you want something - work for it - get it through your own efforts. We really don't want people to become too dependant. Yet, in the church, we call people to just the opposite kind of thinking. We call people to understand that we are totally dependant on God - to place our unwavering trust, not in ourselves but in a Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus feeds the 5000, tends to more of their needs and then sends His disciples ahead in the boat. I don't know how He thought He would catch up with them. But it turned out that 'catching up' was not the problem. When the disciples got part was across the Sea of Galilee a storm blew in. We can not get the sense of the storm from the scripture when our translations only indicate that they are being hampered by the wind and the waves were 'against them'. There are a lot of occasions when we are 'hampered' by things that we encounter but still we arrive at our destination. In truth, the Greek language used indicates that it was a terrible storm. Literally, the language indicates that they were being tortured, tormented or harassed by the waves; they were experiencing severe distress because of the storm. And they could do nothing but hold on for dear life. Imagine being in a small fishing boat - trying to make for shore, yet the winds and the waves are so strong that you are trapped there through the evening and into the wee hours of the morning. Imagine the worry and fear that would have plagued them as they worked just to keep afloat. Maybe it was not in a small boat on the Sea of Galilee, but I suspect that all of us have experienced those times when we have lived through some of those kinds of nights - filled with fear and anxiety - unsure if we will be able to survive the situation. Maybe it was physical - or emotional - or even spiritual. You hold on for dear life. And then Jesus comes walking on the waters.

It is interesting to note that the ancient people of God always understood waters as a

place of chaos and danger. From the beginning of the creation story the chaotic waters had to be separated - given boundaries. And God was in control. They remembered that when human beings turned against God and became totally self interested the waters broke through their boundaries and only Noah and his family were saved. And when they thought about the new heaven and new earth that God would establish - when they talked about the new creation at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation they said that the sea would be no more. They understood in ways that too often we seem to have forgotten that there are things that are too big for us to handle - there are storms and dangers that only God can deal with. And so we see Jesus, quietly, calmly walking across the water.

Did you ever think that it really isn't about walking on water.? Did you ever think that really it is about all of the storms that rage in our lives?

It was interesting to read that some years ago, the Israeli National Parks Authority approved a developer's proposal to construct a submerged, transparent bridge in a small part of the Sea of Galilee. The crescent-shaped bridge, located a few inches below the surface of the water, would allow tourists the opportunity to get their pictures taken "walking on water," as Jesus did. So as not to spoil the effect, architectural plans for the thirteen-foot-wide bridge included no protective guardrails; the plan was to have lifeguards standing by in rescue boats, just in case some absent-minded tourist happened to step off the edge.

It seems to me that too often we just read stories like this in the Bible and think that it is just cute. I think that Christian and non-Christian alike make jokes about walking on the water and treat this story very lightly when, in fact, this story gives us a very important message. God can handle the storms that we try desperately to row through. Will we take His hand and be able to walk through the waters?

I ran across a little writing this week that at first startled me then I though it was kind of cute and finally I began to just appreciate the truth of what it was saying. Here it is:

You are not in control.
You never have been in control.
You never will be in control.
You never should be in control.
You are not in control – of everything
You don't make the sun come up.
You don't make the sun go down.
You don't make your heart beat.
You don't make your blood circulate.
You are not in control -- of anything.

There is a God. You are not it.

Of course we know that we are not God. We can chuckle at the absurdity of the very thought. We know that we don't make the sun go up or down or the heart beat and blood circulate. But, never-the-less we often think that we are in control of everything in our world.

Can you walk on the water? How about when the waters begin to torment, torture and harass you? There Jesus comes to you walking on those waters and inviting you to take His hand by faith. Trusting God is not an easy thing when the waves are against us and we think that maybe we can make it if we just row a little harder. Trusting God is not easy at any time but He invites us into that trust relationship knowing that only He has the power to quiet the storm. Only God is ultimately in control.

The waters of life surround us. Sometimes those waters get churned up to the point that we naturally become afraid. Yet those waters do not hinder our Lord from coming to us and inviting us to come to Him. Do not be afraid. Come! Put your trust in God.

AMEN