

13th Sunday after Pentecost, 2008 (Proper 14A)

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-33

Old Testament: Job 38:4-18

Epistle: Romans 10:5-17

Title: Satisfied People

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It takes a lot to get a grown man to scream in fear. It takes even more to get twelve burly fishermen to shriek like little girls. I've seen several episodes of *The Deadliest Catch*- the Discovery channel show that follows Alaskan crab fishermen through rough Arctic waters. Even in the midst of the most treacherous storms, they still manage to stay in control. I've never heard any of them scream in terror. But none of them saw a ghost either.

This morning the disciples find themselves in the midst of a typical ghost story. It's dark, it's stormy, and they are all alone. The plot seems frighteningly familiar.

It's night, about 3 am, and darkness surrounds them. They had been navigating by the stars, as they had so many times before, but now the stars are hidden by clouds, and they are surrounded by deep darkness. The softly falling rain has increased steadily to a torrential downpour, and the winds are now beating against the tiny vessel. Each disciple strains at his oar, trying to get the boat back under control. Everyone is shouting directions. It's enough to make anyone scared.

What makes things worse is that they are all alone. The last time they were in a wicked storm, Jesus was in the boat with them (and fast asleep). When they managed to wake Him up, it only took a word and the wind and waves were still. But now they are all alone. Jesus has sent them on ahead while He stayed to pray. Without Jesus, the darkness seemed even darker, the winds seemed even stronger, and their peril even more dread.

And then they see something off in the distance. It's hard to make out at first, but it comes closer and closer. It looks like a man, but that's impossible. Certainly this could be no mere mortal. It must be a ghost, a phantom, a spirit come back from the grave. In that ghost, in that storm, and in that darkness, they saw death, and they were sore afraid. Shrieks of horror emerge from their lips as time seems to move in slow motion. They are now living their worst nightmare. They are in the middle of a ghost story.

But everything changes with a few words.

First word: "Take courage". Jesus speaks this word often to people who are anxious or worried. This does not mean "suck it up" and "be a man." Jesus is not calling His disciples cowards. Rather, this word is a call to trust in the Lord. He is the source of our courage, our strength. This word means "Trust in me." In John 16 Jesus uses this same word when He says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Trust in me, rely on me in difficult times.

There will be times when your own strength and courage fail you. There will be times when death surrounds you. At such a time look not to yourself or to the strength of those around you. Look only to Jesus, Jesus who comes to you across the water.

When Jesus walks on the water, He is not just showing off. Jesus' miracles do more than prove His divinity. If Jesus only wanted to prove that He was God, He could have had a grand magic show for the people and left no doubt - stones to bread and a fantastic leap off the temple, just like Satan wanted. No, Jesus' miracles show us that He is the Lord of creation, and He is reversing the curse of Adam. Sickness, pain and death are a result of sin, and so Jesus comes to cure, to heal, and to raise the dead.

The water bit is not a parlor trick - He's not Criss Angel or David Blaine - He is the Lord. When Jesus walks on water it shows you what it means to be the Lord. The sea is synonymous with death itself. It is a place of chaos, a place of sea monsters. The sea will swallow you up like the grave, and you will never be seen again. In this sea the first Jonah sunk like a rock, all the way to the grave, but Jesus, the second Jonah walks, treading death and the great serpent under His feet.

This is the Jesus who says to the disciples: "Take heart, I am." Jesus is the I am, the one who brought all creation into existence, and still sustains it. "I am," says Jesus. Because Jesus is, you are. Jesus speaks His name to the disciples, just as He spoke centuries before to Moses in the burning bush. "I am that I am." Because Jesus walks on the water, because He treads death and Satan under His feet, there is no reason to fear.

And so Jesus tells His disciples, "Take heart, I am. Don't be afraid." Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear looks inward; fear happens when you look at yourself and your problems, and you realize that your problems are more than you can handle. Fear happens when you look in the mirror and see someone who is weak, vulnerable, and helpless. Fear comes when your life seems out of control. Fear sees the waves and the storm and the deep waters. Fear is the result of the law- it sizes you up and finds you wanting. When you are faced with who you really are, the reality of your sin and the effects it has had on your life, you are afraid.

Faith looks only at Jesus. Faith sees the one who made the wind and the waters. Faith sees the one who has taken your sin upon Himself. Faith sees the one who created you and purchased you as His own. Faith sees the one who satisfies you with every good thing. Faith sees the one who has come to rescue you.

When Jesus walks on the water, He is not showing off. He has come to bring calm in the midst of terror. He has come with hope in time of despair. He has come bringing life to a world of death. He has come to rescue His disciples.

Peter thinks He gets it. And he wants to play, too. Peter wants to defy death and be like Jesus. "May I?" says Peter? "Come," says Jesus, and Jesus' word draws Peter out of the boat and across the water. But Peter's faith is little. Soon He stops looking at Jesus and looks down

at his feet. And when he looks down, and sees the water and the waves and the seaweed and the fish, it's like Wile E. Coyote running off a cliff. Peter begins to sink.

But Peter's little faith prays a big prayer. "Lord, save me!" And the Lord hears Peter's prayer and immediately His hand reaches out to grab Peter and put him back in the boat. Peter is not quite ready for the full-blast Jesus, and so it's back in the boat for a while longer. The Lord rescues him again and brings him back to safety.

So take heart, have courage, trust in the Lord. The Lord is with you. The one made the heavens and the earth has come here to be with you and to rescue you. Have no fear.

One day the Lord will call you out of the boat of this world to walk hand in hand with your Lord. There will be no ghosts, no darkness, and no storms. "Also, before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal." The sea will be clear and calm, and there you will walk with the Lord.

"Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" The voices that have screamed in terror now confess Jesus as the Son of God. Our voices join in their confession in the words of the Apostles' Creed.