

August 13, 2023
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 14:22–33 (Job 38:4–18)

TAKE HEART IN JESUS AND DO NOT BE AFRAID.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

When someone exhibits great emotional endurance through all kinds of adversity, trials, and tribulations, we often say that person has “the patience of Job,” even though their suffering does not even come close to the intensity of misery suffered by the biblical Job. His story teaches us how fragile life is in this vale of tears.

Job was a real man who lived in a specific place and time in history. The Bible says he:

“... was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” (Job 1:1)

He was a wealthy man, possessing so many flocks and herds and servants that He was the greatest of all the people of the east. (cf: Job 1:3) He had ten children whom he deeply loved. Each of them, on their birthdays, would hold a great feast that lasted several days. When the feast was over, as spiritual head of the household, Job demonstrated a wonderful example of Godly parenting. He would offer a burnt sacrifice to God on behalf of his children and pray for them, because in his words:

“It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” (Job 1:5)

Job’s life was smooth luxurious sailing, until one day when God, in His hidden wisdom, allowed Satan to test Job. In a single day, great calamity fell upon Job’s children and possessions, virtually wiping out everything that he held dear. (Job 1:13–19) Yet his response to the news was:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21)

As if adding injury to insult, also in God’s hidden wisdom, He then allowed Satan to attack Job’s health with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. In grief he sat in ashes and scraped his wounds with a broken piece of pottery. Scriptures says that his wife demanded that he:

“Curse God and die.”¹⁰ But he said to her, “... Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2:9–10)

But eventually the aggravation of his troubles, compounded by the irritating advice of his cynical friends, caused Job to sin by directly charging God with being cruel to him. (cf: Job 30:21–23) Job did not think he deserved the burden that was placed upon his shoulders. In his self-righteousness, he thought he deserved better. (cf: Job 29-31)

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we hear the climax of the book of Job where God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind, (cf: Job 38:1) asking rhetorical questions to illustrate to Job the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways. (cf: Job 38:4–18, Romans 11:33)

The book of Job teaches us the wisdom of listening to, waiting patiently for, and trusting in the Lord to declare us righteous, vindicate our sufferings, and, above all, to trust in God to save us. God does not send evil, sickness, and suffering into the world. They are from the devil. Yet, what the believer cannot see is our hidden God accomplishing His righteous purposes in the midst and through suffering.

No one is immune to the storms of life that test your faith. Let me tell you about a pious and God-fearing Lutheran couple named Gene and Rose Marie. While God richly blessed them with six sons, one died of kidney failure at 3 weeks old, another died in an automobile accident at age 23, a third died in a snowmobile accident at age 18. Gene and Rose Marie are not anomalies in their grief and suffering. Life is fragile in this vale of tears even for those of strong faith.

Perhaps you have dreamed of living in paradise and have been saving to make it happen. Like Job, it all can be taken away in the blink of an eye. God's hidden wisdom, He has allowed wildfires to sweep through the Hawaiian island of Maui, reducing homes into ash, and taking the lives of over 90 people. Yet our hidden God is working in the background. His will be done.

Maybe your storms come in the form of religious persecution. As I said a few months ago, anti-Christian hostility are higher right now than at any other time in our nation's history. (cf: <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF23D04.pdf>) Life is difficult when sailing against the wind and waves of sinful people in a sinful world. Life can be frightening when our country's moral compass is broken and spinning out of control.

You face waves of adversity. You have found yourself in tempestuous seas. You might go for weeks at a time enjoying smooth and calm waters. But then it seems that there are days and days of nothing but stormy seas. You can paddle your boat as hard as you can, but the winds and waves press against you making headway impossible as you face natural disasters, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires; as you face untimely and devastating deaths in your family like Gene and Rose Marie suffered; or as you endure religious persecution from the unbelieving world. All it takes is to receive one phone call to for a little test of faith to quickly morph into complete lack of faith. Storms of life come in statements like:

- *“Mom fell and is in the hospital.”*
- *“Some people have a good recovery from a stroke like yours.”*
- *“Your job has been eliminated. You have 30 minutes to clean out your desk.”*
- *“Kids, I’m sorry, but your mom and I just can’t live together anymore.”*

Remember, Job did not think he deserved the burden that was placed upon his shoulders. In his self-righteousness, he thought he deserved better. All you truly deserve is God's eternal condemnation and punishment because of your transgressions against Him. Due to your inherited sin from Adam, your moral compass is broken leaving in your wake a host of sins that you have done and things you have left undone.

In our Gospel text today, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side of the sea. (cf: Matthew 14:22) He is omniscient. He knows the wind and waves would be against them, but He sent them out so that He could reveal to Him who exactly He is. He is the Christ, the only Son of God who has all authority over creation. Unlike a previous instance when a storm on the lake caused the disciples to be afraid, (cf: Matthew 8:23–27) in today's text, even though their boat is against the waves and the wind, the disciples are not afraid. It is only when they see Jesus walking on the water that they fear. Exhausted, wet, and windblown, these experienced fishermen think they see a ghost. Jesus quickly puts them at ease saying:

“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27)

Even though Peter had been traveling with Jesus for almost two years, his faith was not strong enough to recognize Jesus' voice and His words. He asked Jesus to prove who He was – as if Jesus walking on the water was not enough. As Peter walked on the water toward Jesus – he took his eyes off Jesus, and he began to sink. Jesus reached out and took hold of him and said:

“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² ***And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.***³³ ***And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*** (Matthew 14:31–33)

Life is fragile – and your faith is even *more* fragile. The storms of this life distract you from:

“... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2)

When you lose sight of Christ and Him crucified for you – you lose sight of your salvation and the winds beat you down and the waves overwhelm you. You become in danger of sinking deeper into sin, doubt, and despair. Job demanded that God give him the reason for his sufferings. (cf: Job 30-31) He thought he deserved better. God responded to him out of a whirlwind, not with answers, but with the questions we heard in our Old Testament text. God's rhetorical questions ***demonstrated*** His power in creation and His continued providence in this broken and sinful world.

Peter first disbelieved it was Jesus walking on the water. Not believing Jesus' voice, Peter then demanded proof of Jesus' identity, asking Jesus to call him out on the water, but his weak faith caused him to sink. In your weakness and lack of faith, you too, demand proof and answers. But God word to you is:

“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27)

“... [His] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [His] ways...”
(Isaiah 55:8)

When you feel you floundering in the water and drowning, cry out with Peter:

“Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30)

Jesus reaches out His hand to pull you from the waves before you are swept under. He lifts you out of the swirling waves of doubt and despair, and out of the seas of your sin and shame. He draws you to Himself into the holy Ark of His Church where He offers you healing and hope, and His life saving grace.

For all who are in Christ's Church – we are in this boat together. Jesus walks through the winds and over the troubled waters of your adversity to heal the brokenness of your fragile faith. He brings to you all the blessings He earned for you on Calvary's cross where He stretched out His hands for you. With His nail pierced hands, He reaches down to pull you out of the mud and out of the mire of transgression. He restores you with His complete forgiveness of sin, the sins caused by your broken moral compass, and those things you have done and left undone. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus strengthens your faith and grants you the sure hope of everlasting life.

Right here in the Divine Service, as you and all the saints cry out: "*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy!*" He comes to you in the preaching of His Word and in His Sacraments to give you assurance that He is with you and will never forsake you, girding you up in your swirling waves of doubt and despair. He gives you the assurance that He has borne your griefs and carries our sorrows. He strengthens you to face all of the changes and challenges of this fragile life.

When you are floundering in the stormy seas, and the waves are crashing upon you, cry out "*Lord, save me!*" "*Lord have mercy!*" Fix your eyes on Jesus the founder and perfecter of your faith. Fix your eyes on Him who saved you by His death on the cross, who has adopted you in Baptismal waters, and who calls you to faith by the Gospel. In the washing of the water and the Word you have put on Christ. (cf: Galatians 3:27) You are clothed in the righteousness of the One who has defeated sin, death, and the devil. The tempestuous seas can do nothing to harm you. The worst thing that can happen is – you will be thrown into the arms of Savior where you will live with Him in everlasting blessedness and peace.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.