

Sermon—Sunday, August 10, 2008
The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)
By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson **Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28**
Psalm **Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b**
Second Lesson **Romans 10:5-15**
Gospel Lesson **Matthew 14:22-33**

I once heard about a man who bought an amazing hunting dog. What was so amazing about this particular dog is that he could walk on water.

Every time the man would go duck hunting, he'd bring the dog along in his boat. And every time he shot a duck, the fowl would fall to the surface of the water and before you knew it, the dog would leap out of the boat, run of the top of lake waves and pick up the bird in its mouth and bring it back to the boat.

One day, the man brought a cynical friend along to show him what his dog could do. From sun-up until sun-down, the man would shoot, and the dog would skim the surface of the water and retrieve.

The man's friend said nothing at all.

Finally, the man couldn't stand it any longer; he casually turned to his friend and asked, "So, what do you think of my new hunting dog?"

"I think you got gypped," the man's friend said, "that dog can't even swim!"

In this morning Gospel lesson, we hear the wonderful story of Jesus walking on the water (I really don't know if he could swim or not). As the story goes, the disciples are lounging on the sea when, suddenly, the water gets a little rough. The wind and the waves were bashing the boat, and the disciples—by early morning—found themselves far away from the shore. They were terrified.

Jesus had gone by himself to the top of a mountain to pray. When he was finished, he joined the terrified disciples by walking on the water towards the boat. This, of course, terrified them even more, and the disciples mistook Jesus

for a ghost. Jesus calmed their fears by identifying himself to them, and Peter urged Jesus to command him to walk on the water also.

“Come,” Jesus said to Peter.

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Why did you doubt?

Why *do* you doubt?

The point of today’s Gospel reading is that God is ruler of creation and therefore is to be adored and served. The maker of heaven and earth still governs all that has been made; this is the basis for our worship and the foundation of our hope.

But we still doubt, don’t we?

Sometimes our doubt is a direct result of too little faith. But too little faith is not remedied by sitting ourselves down and resolving to have more faith; this usually leads to an even deeper crisis of faith and makes matters worse. We focus more and more on ourselves and less and less on God, as Peter did when he approached him on the sea.

We are all so much like Peter, aren’t we? We are capable of so many things, yet we let our circumstances (or, our perceived circumstances) get the best of us. We’re all capable of walking on water and, yet, we’re afraid to even get our feet wet.

We’d much rather sit on the shore and complain. It’s much drier there, and there’s less of a chance that Jesus will actually ask us to do something—like walk on water.

Yet, that’s exactly what we’re asked to do. We’re asked to walk on water, we’re asked to do amazing things (all with God’s help, of course), and we’re asked to bring Good News to the world through our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Yes, sometimes we doubt, just like Peter. Yes, sometimes we can even deny Christ, just like Peter. Yet, just like Peter, Christ builds his church on us, so that we might be heralders of Christ's domain in the world.

So, come then: leave the safety of your boat—or your shore—and walk on water. Jesus is calling to all of this morning.

Do you hear his voice?

Amen. ...

©copyright 2008 – Tim Ljunggren