

**“Take Heart; It Is I. Do Not Be Afraid” (Matthew 14:26-33)**

For Your Life in Christ the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

**Introduction: The Serious Dilemma of Doubt**

A. As Christians who live in faith in Christ, we are to avoid doubt:

**James 1:5-8: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. <sup>6</sup>But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup>he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”**

B. There is simply no question that doubt is antithetical to faith.

1. Prof. Harold Buls: “Faith dare not be unsteady like a falling and rising wave but steady as calm water. Doubt is the beginning of unbelief. The doubter begins to sink...” (Exegetical Notes Gospel Texts Series A Matthew-John Sundays after Pentecost, 41)
2. And, “Doubt is always in vain, dangerous and to no purpose in the life of the believer. It is even unreasonable in view of the many promises of God.” (Ibid, 41)
3. In James that we read above, doubt amounts to the terrible diagnosis of being the “double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Here “double-minded” that elaborates on “doubt” = *di-psuchos* = two-spirited, i.e. vacillating (in opinion or purpose).
4. The word “doubt” itself is important to understand = “to be at odds with oneself.”
5. So you can see the importance of the issue: we are to have faith that Christ is our Savior, but to doubt is to question whether He really is our Savior, of if we are really saved; it is to question our position and our status in Christ. These kinds of doubts are extremely dangerous and indeed threaten to destroy faith altogether.

**Part I: Yes, But...We Doubt!**

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- A. This is not to announce a capitulation to the sinful nature, as if to say, “God is demanding too much; the truth of the matter is that we doubt, so I will just give in to the sinful nature.” No! We mustn’t rationalize in such a way that says “this is just the way it is.” Doubt is an enemy of your faith and therefore your salvation. In today’s Gospel, our Savior is warning us against it.
- B. Point blank: doubt has the potential to destroy us.
- C. This is true, especially because doubt is so closely associated with fear. Here is a fascinating detail in our Gospel:
  1. When St. Peter starts to sink he appears to be afraid for his life. He cries out to the Lord, “Lord, save me!”
  2. This is interesting from the standpoint that we know from John 21:7 that St. Peter the fisherman was a good swimmer.
  3. But when doubt and fear overcome us, even what we can do under normal circumstances starts to fail us. St. Peter was on the verge of total destruction. This is why Satan wants to fill us with doubt. Enough of it can destroy us, and this is Satan’s goal.
- D. At the same time, on account of sin, it is a very human problem. That is, it is something we actually experience. It is just wrong to deny that believers battle doubt. It *does* occur and we must be compassionate to Christians humble enough to admit it. Still, we mustn’t pretend that it isn’t a major problem!
- E. We doubt in so many ways:
  1. We doubt the promises of God even though we know in faith that He keeps His promises.
  2. We doubt what the Lord calls good – like marriage or repentance or sexual purity – and we want to call what is good “not good” even though God cannot lie.

3. We doubt that we will have strength to endure, even though the Lord Himself who is Almighty is with us. In Hebrews we are reminded:

**Hebrews 13:6: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”**

- F. And yet again we doubt His very Word and this proves that we are sinners. And as in a form of insanity, we exchange what is nothing but good for us to have (faith) with that which is totally destructive for us to have (doubt).

**Part II: But We Can Learn From What Happened To Peter!**

- A. First we need to appreciate that when sinners see the power of God like when the disciples actually saw Christ walking on water, they tremble in fear (Ex 3:6; 20:18; Is 6:5). But notice what Christ does, He immediately speaks to them:

**Matthew 14:27: “But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’”**

- B. Jesus gives them a command, “Take heart!” and then another, “Do not be afraid!” The commands – the powerful Word of Christ – gives what it commands. The fear leaves St. Peter’s heart and it is replaced by cheer and courage! This is what the Word did for St. Peter!  
C. And St. Peter says something profound that expresses a deep understanding of faith. Read vs 28 with me:

**Matthew 14:28: “And Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’”**

- D. These words of St. Peter do not mean that He was testing the Lord. St. Peter *knows* that it is Christ. The Word of Christ has already calmed His fears. He is saying that as it IS Christ, that Christ can bid Him to come and St. Peter will come.  
E. Do you see the amazing insight of faith?  
F. Faith believes that God will do whatever He says, whatever He speaks. Lenski says, “This was true boldness of faith on Peter’s part, that strength of faith which knows and trusts that even natural impossibilities yield before the will, word, and power of Jesus.” (*The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 573)

- G. That is, faith is in tune to the word. If Christ gives the word, then *faith knows what to latch onto, not to itself, not to “self-confidence,” or bravery, or will-power, or positive thinking, or magic, etc. Faith holds to the Word of Jesus Christ! In this moment of enlightenment, St. Peter knows it!*  
H. So Jesus spoke, “Come.” (verse 29)  
I. And the rest is history: St. Peter was walking on water. This was a miracle.  
J. What happens next is also an invaluable lesson:  
1. Peter takes his eyes off of Christ, but notice what the book of Hebrews teaches:

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

2. Faith is only strong in respect to Jesus and nothing else.  
3. To look to Him means we are safe, strong and stable.  
4. But St. Peter became consumed with something else, namely the wind and the waves. It was only then that he began to sink. *When he took his eyes off of Christ!*

**Conclusion: But Jesus Did Not Rebuke St. Peter**

- A. Some commentators say that Jesus began to rebuke Peter.  
B. No, Jesus knew how the disciples reacted to the feeding of the 5000 (Mk. 6:52 says their hearts were still hard); and Jesus knew what was coming the next day when many would turn from Him (Jn 6). Jesus was anxious to teach his disciples.

- C. So He saves Peter in response to his cry (as He saves you) and then He teaches about faith. It is “little” when we take our eyes off of Christ, but it can grow; it can be strengthened when we learn to steady our gaze on Christ. When we learn more and more that ***there is medicine for doubt: the Word of Christ.*** This Word that assures you that His blood covers you; His victory over death is yours; and His life and Spirit are given to you so that in the forgiveness of all your sins, your fear has been dealt with, so that it is with great joy that we keep our eyes on Christ and worship Him as the disciples did that day as they said to the Lord, ***“Truly you are the Son of God.”*** (vs. 33)