

Pastor Joe Polzin
Matthew 14:22-33
“Jesus the Creator and Savior”
Year A – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)
August 9, 2020

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

In our Gospel Reading last week, we saw Jesus feed the five thousand, where the disciples learned more about who Jesus is. He is the God who continually provides for the needs of his people. In our reading this week, which follows immediately on the heels of that miracle, the disciples will continue to learn about Jesus. They will learn that Jesus is both Creator and Savior. And what they will find, and what we would do well to always remember, is that if we lose sight of either of those two things, Jesus as our Creator or Jesus as our Savior, we will lose sight of Jesus himself.

What we find first in our text this week is that Jesus is dismissing the crowds. You’ll remember that when the large crowd was gathered around Jesus and evening came, the disciples wanted him to dismiss the crowds so that they could find food for themselves. But Jesus refused until he had the opportunity to feed the many thousands of people in miraculous fashion. Only after they were satisfied were the crowds personally dismissed by Jesus. And then he sends the disciples into the boat, while he himself goes to pray.

That’s when things become challenging for the disciples. A strong wind picks up and makes their journey difficult. Now remember, many of these were experienced fisherman, they knew how to handle a boat, but they weren’t making much progress. And in the fourth watch of the night, sometime between 3 and 6 in the morning, Jesus walks on the water to them. And the disciples were terrified, but not at the waves, rather at the one who was able to walk upon them.

“It is a ghost!” they cried out in fear. The disciples were face-to-face with something truly supernatural. They were visited by someone who has the ability to traverse the waters on foot. There are only so many conclusions you can reach when you see something like that. Either this is not someone who is flesh and blood, which is where the disciples landed, claiming it was a ghost. And I wonder if they went that direction because that was the less frightening of the two options. Because if it wasn’t a ghost, and it wasn’t, then it had to be Jesus in flesh and blood, which meant something even more terrifying.

Our Old Testament Reading lays it out. When Job questioned the will and wisdom of God, God answers him by asking, where was Job when God laid the foundation of the earth? Where was Job when God “shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb”... when [God] “prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?” (Job 38:4, 8, 10-11). In other words, God was reminding Job that he alone is the Creator, and that he alone has power over all things in this world, including the earth and sea. Therefore, we cannot possibly begin to understand his ways or his wisdom.

This is the same reality the disciples now faced. They were presented with the one who has authority and power over the wind and waves, over the earth and sea, and that is a truly terrifying thing when you think about it. Because it also means that he is the one who has authority and power over you. And we are subject to what he chooses do with us.

The disciples were face-to-face with Jesus as Creator, the one through whom, as Scripture says, all things were made and “without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). But face-to-face with their Creator, the disciples had lost sight of Jesus as Savior. Remember, to lose sight of either of those two things is to lose sight of Jesus himself. And so, Jesus reminds them that he is not there to wield his power and authority as Creator against them, but rather to save and comfort them. “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (Matt. 14:27).

Now, that’s when Peter decides to make his infamous journey. “Lord, if it is you…” Notice, Peter is not fully convinced. This is not an act of great faith on Peter’s part, as many people try to conclude from this, but rather an act of little-faith, as Jesus says later. “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (14:28). And Jesus permits it. And Peter gets out of the boat and also walks on the water by the authority that Jesus as Creator possesses.

But that’s when things go wrong again. Assured now that Jesus is, in fact, his Savior, that he is there to comfort the disciples and not to terrify them, Peter steps out of the boat and begins to walk on water. But that’s when he loses sight of Jesus as Creator. And again, losing sight of either is to lose sight of Jesus. Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus and instead looks at the wind and the waves, and he was afraid. He so quickly forgot who has the power and authority over the sea itself. And he ends up crying out in desperation, “Lord, save me!” (14:30)

But even though Peter may have forgotten, Jesus remains both Creator and Savior. And as Savior, he immediately reaches out his hand, takes hold of Peter, and says, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” In other words, why did Peter lose sight of who Jesus is? And then, as Creator, Jesus brings Peter back to the boat and causes the wind to cease. And that’s when the disciples, seeing Jesus as both Creator *and* Savior, couldn’t help but worship him. They say, “Truly you are the Son of God!” (14:33)

As I mentioned earlier, Peter isn’t a model of faith for us in this passage. However, he and the disciples are people we can certainly identify with. Because in our lives, we too may be tempted to lose sight of who Jesus is, both our Creator and our Savior. Especially the past several months, where we have been confronted with so many worrying realities, and uncertainties, and difficulties. Where we have been made even more painfully aware of our true human condition—that we are constantly subject to our enemies of sin, and death, and the devil.

If, in these times, we readily acknowledge Jesus as Creator, but lose sight that he is also our Savior, we may admit that Jesus is in control, but we might forget how it is he loves and values us. We see the uncertainties of this created world, and we also see what life is like in it—that we are constantly struggling against our own sinful nature. We see that all people are subject to the wages of sin, which is death. And we see that the devil seems to be so often running rampant in this mixed-up world. And we may wonder, what does God think of me?

Forgetting that Jesus is our Savior, like the disciples forgot when they were face-to-face with their Creator God on the seas, well, that can only produce in us fear and little-faith. Yes, Jesus may be in control, but where does that leave you and me? We may despair and wonder from where our help could possibly come?

But Jesus reminds you, as he firmly reminded his disciples, that he has come to save you. He does not wield his power and authority over all creation against you, but in order to comfort you. Jesus reached out his hands on cross so that he could save you from your sins. He proclaimed his victory over the devil by his death and resurrection. And he trampled over death itself when he walked out of his tomb on Easter.

Nothing in all the heights and depths of this created universe will ever separate you from the love God has for you in Christ Jesus. Your Savior has a plan for you. And that’s why he

came. To save you, and to bring you into a future with him that is good and perfect. Therefore, we listen, as Jesus also says directly to us today, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Of course, there are other times when the opposite is true. When we readily acknowledge Jesus as Savior, but we lose sight that he is also Creator. Although we know he loves us, we may forget that Jesus is also in control, especially as we look around this world and are tempted to wonder how that could possibly be true.

And this can lead us down a dangerous road of little-faith. Because if we forget that God is in control, then we’re tempted to believe it’s up to us to take control. We’re like Peter, jumping over the side of the boat, yelling at God, “If it’s really you, God, then you should do something about this!” “If you’re really in control, you’ll allow me to do what I think is best.”

But the end result of this little-faith is to come crashing back down, realizing we aren’t in control. And we never can be. We’re not the Creator. And so, like Peter who took his eyes off Jesus and could only pay attention to the wind and the waves, we too can only sink.

I hear from many of you that you feel like you’re sinking these days. And no wonder. We spend so much time listening to the news, and looking at Facebook or Twitter, and reading everything that’s published online. We allow our fears and concerns to run rampant. But what we’re really doing is training our hearts and minds to take our eyes off of Jesus as Creator, and put them instead on anything else in this creation.

And if this is how you’re feeling right now, whether it’s about the pandemic, or the election, or anything else you’re going through personally, there’s only one solution: to turn it off. And I meant that quite literally. Turn off the news. Stop watching it. Stop going on social media. Stop reading the articles whose only purpose is to grab your attention with some sensational headline. Because all those things do is convince you to take your eyes off of your Creator who is before you and have you focus your attention on the wind and the waves instead.

Jesus stands before you today, and in his Invocation and Absolution, asks you to remember your Baptism, that he has worked faith in you and he calls you one of his own. He invites you to find his true body and blood in this meal so that he may forgive you all of your sins. He guides you to abide in his Word. You can start with Psalm 46: “Be still and know that I am God,” he says. And as you encounter and listen to your Creator God and see that he is right there beside you, he reminds you, as he firmly reminded his disciples, that he is always in control. And all things serve his will. And thanks be to him for that.

Jesus is in control. He will guide us through this world and all its troubles, even if on certain days we feel like we’re just rowing against the wind. Jesus will guide us into the perfect creation that is to come, the new heavens and the new earth, which we will see on the day he returns to raise us from the dead. Jesus is in control of this creation that he is ruling from the right hand of God. He doesn’t need our help. Instead, he simply invites us to stop our doubting, and to trust in him.

Jesus is both our Creator and Savior. And we are reminded once again today that he’s not only one or the other. He is both. And he is both for you. And when the Holy Spirit guides you to see Jesus for who he is, who he truly is, the one who loves you so much that he both created and saved you, you can be confident that he will lead you each and every day of your life, until you see the place in his eternal kingdom that your Creator and Savior has prepared for you. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**