

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (2017)

Matthew 14:22–33 Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” 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.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!

‘Amen!,’ my dear ones, means, ‘That’s the only sure ground I have to stand on before my God!’ Our washing, a word we use in English that just comes in from the Greek of the Christian Bible: Baptism! But not just ANY washing, any baptism—Holy, meaning, unlike any other; at the word, in the Name of Jesus!

Happy Day! For the faith of THAT washing AND the DOUBT that always ATTENDS Holy Baptism are on full display with blessed Saint Peter walking on the water in his doubt! So say you ‘Amen!’ with all you’ve got in you, when you make remembrance every morning, noon and evening, or your Baptism. Or say you ‘Amen!’ with the words of our opening hymn, that we have been RESCUED from our first king, Satan, with his temptation to sin and then despair—RESCUED by the King of the New Kingdom of heaven. So that we may say to ANYONE who is mouthpiece for the Accuser:

‘Hear this proclamation! I am baptized into Christ! Drop your ugly accusation; I am not so soon enticed! Now that to the font I’ve traveled, All your might has come unraveled, And, against your tyranny, God, my Lord, unites with me!’

What is Satan’s ‘tyranny,’ my friends? The HOLD he has—even still—over the man of the old kingdom that still lives at our core. The Old Adam—to be drowned every day in our Baptism, the Small Catechism teaches—can ONLY do TWO things with God and His Word and His Kingdom and Jesus and Holy Baptism. And Saint Peter displays them BOTH!

All that the Old Man that’s us can do in the presence of the Real God is to hide or strut! To DESPAIR or BOAST! To NOT-TRUST that God passed our wrongs to His Son; or to TRUST that HE has some RESPONSE to heaven that sets him apart from all others, baptized or not, religious or not, Christian or not, church-going or church-avoiding.

In our readings today:

‘Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to....’

Coleridge wrote ‘drink!’ I want to say, ‘nor any drop to BAPTIZE!’

I was thinking that it is strange that we hear of the Baptism of Jesus, of the crowds from all over—but of NO baptism of any of the apostles, apart from Saint Paul. But then the lessons this week spoke to me of at LEAST THREE Baptisms that Saint Peter had! Or at least 2 and one-half!

He only got about half-baptized today, didn’t he?! Shame, really! Like some of our Baptist brothers and sisters demand, a proper Baptism has the nice imagery of going ALL THE WAY under the water! Saint Peter was only just sinking, the text says, and cried out for Jesus to save him. When what the man really needed was to go all the way down.

He HAD been with Jesus, in a boat, before! And when the Lord filled Old Peter’s nets to bursting as only God’s Son could do, Old Adam-Peter did the ‘despair’ thing: ‘If GOD is with YOU, then YOU need to get FAR AWAY from ME!’

Instead, the Lord gave Old Peter a new calling, to be a man-netter. And for that calling, the Lord did indeed baptized His best friend. When His best friend BOASTED that UNLIKE the others, HE would stand OUT when it came to Jesus’ moment of crisis! He even corrupted the rest of the disciples:

“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall

away.”³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”³⁵ Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

That was a Baptism if ever there was one; the water come out his eyes!

After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.”⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed.⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

THEN he was under, all the way under; and ready to be raised when Jesus was raised.

Please hear me, my dear ones! Y’all hafta work for a living, while your pastor has all the time in the week to LUXURIATE in the Scriptures and wallow in them. But what I jot down is—I pray—nothing but Your Holy Spirit’s revelation of your Savior to you! Hear me!

Two things need fixin’! *One*: the DOUBT of Peter shows up well BEFORE he stepped out on the sea of Galilee! And *two*: ‘You of little faith’ is perhaps NOT a bad thing at all!

For they HAD Jesus with them, revealed to them, ‘It is I!’

And they HAD His comforting Word: ‘Fear not!’ Oh, but these are the SAME men who—just last reading, last week—heard from Jesus, ‘Y’ALL give the 5000 something to eat!’ And, AGAIN, His Word was not enough for them. What with only FIVE loaves AND TWO fish!—(nice, isn’t it, that they had to INFORM the Lord God in the Flesh how many of each kind was there! Disciples!)

So the Word ‘Fear not!’ was not enough. There had to come our ‘IF,’ Peter’s ‘IF.’ ‘IF it is you—just Joshua of Nazareth, whose mother and father everyone knows; the carpenter’s son; supposed king whose prophet John was just shamefully, tragically killed in prison—if it IS YOU, then YOU can give ME what ME thinks ME needs! If YOU can walk on the water, then YOU can make ME do it!

In a word: DOUBT!

And thank God for our Baptism into Christ!

For HOLY Baptism is NOT what either group of Christians on each side of us Lutherans says it is!

It is NOT OUR promise to God to really turn to page over now.

And Holy Baptism is NOT some religious superstition that we get in the stream of, on our way to saving our souls.

Holy Baptism is the little word of the gentle dove of the Spirit, to say that where weak Jesus is, there all of God is; and where His little flock is, His Church, there the Father sends His Spirit unlike any other. For sinners only, to call them to

repentance. To forgive them so utterly, that they make bold to pray daily and much, ‘As WE have ALREADY forgiven those who sin against US, now YOU, dear Father, know how to forgive US TOO!’

Which makes me think that ‘you of little faith’ is not necessarily a bad thing. Is the Lord pointing to the fact—borne out by the history of the Church—that HIS Word and HIS gifts and HIS sacrifice for us are NEVER counted as great and big and impressive as the boasts and offerings and religiosity of men? With all the waves heaving around us—boasts of men, despair of men—is the Lord calling out to us to rejoice in, to TRUST in, what passes by the notice of so many: just a bit of water and the pledge of His Word? Which may even seem too little for us?

Today we witness the greatest in the kingdom of heaven! A precious little girl—whom the Word of God calls a rebel against God, lost and sinful and condemned, no matter what the world says—is washed by the authority, in the Name of Jesus. And the Gospel according to Saint Matthew teaches us—again!—to set our sights on HER accomplishments, HER faith, HER religion, HER God!

For you can’t get a better picture of a disciple; second best is Peter! For she has even LESS to do with becoming a child of God than she had to do with popping out of mom eight days ago! Just like you, like me! ‘Happy Day!’

And it is now the happy work of parents and sponsors and the whole Christian Church, to teach her to pray to God as her Father with all boldness and confidence—despite her sins of doubt and

superiority! (How's Dominic like sharing the throne, Wednesday?! Ha!)

And as little Emily's parents have already learned from the King of their castle, all they need to do is to tell their child EVERYTHING that she needs to do, EVERY moment of EVERY day—and then TOMORROW, they need to tell him, her, EVERYTHING they need to do, EVERY moment, of EVERY day—and then the next day...

A little child, a limber elf
Singing, dancing to itself,
A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
That always finds, and never seeks,
Makes such a vision to the sight
As fills a father's eyes with light;

(They move out, my dear ones! But they cannot hide from your prayers, or their Savior, or the love of God their Father!)

The Lord is coming right soon, dear Christians; I'm counting on Him rolling up the sky before we rise up on our hind legs for the final hymn!

But if in His mysterious ways He holds off long enough, the little one, with her little faith, will learn to find her little Savior in a little bit of bread and wine, which a frail pastor says in a faltering voice is the Bread of heaven to give her life, despite her doubts and boasts.

And there's one more little—GLORIOUS!—aspect of this whole day, and the Baptism of her Majesty Strickland. It is that she will bear the name of the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, her great grandmother.

Her great grandmother was in a home; her shepherd found Jesus' little lamb. And she said to me—in her tenth decade of her Christian walk!—‘Pastor, why would God care about someone like me, after all the sins I've done in my life?!’ Happy for her, after a couple tries I got out of kindergarten! And I know how to read! And I read to her to crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. And then I read the last words of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, in which the Lord says disciples are HIS when they hear His Word, and when they are baptized.

And the greatest in the kingdom of heaven said to me, ‘Oh, yes! And I was baptized into Christ too! HE said that HE rose for Me! That's what I was baptized for!’

And then she said to me, ‘Thank you for that message. Now, do you have a church that you work for, or do you just go around doing this?’

And though she had forgotten who her poor shepherd was, Emily did not forget her Good Shepherd. And her Good Shepherd spoke kindly to her through her poor shepherd. And today, the song goes on!

Waves, in the Bible, are a picture of this stormy Old Adam world. The world can only tell you to chuck the Ten Commandments and live by your own rules—DESPAIR—or to get

so religious that you scare everyone else.

Emily Widiger, Emily Strickland, all y'all and me too—we are the Holy Spirit's little, gentle word to the world, which says that with all that's in us, we must do our best to live out God's will, love for Him, love for neighbor; that's our burden to the end.

But the happiest gift we have been given is not the Law, but the Gospel! To tell a world that loves to sin AND to CONDEMN, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, is King of the New Kingdom of Heaven, which only accepts those who need saving.

In a word, as surely as Jesus was sent for the nations, you and I have been put here for the nations, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!