

**Sunday, August 9, 2020 – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Reliable”**

Matthew 14: 22-33

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Has this ever happened to you? It happened more before we all had apps on our phone to tell us where to go... you are given directions to someone's house or some other location, and the distance turns out to be much greater than you expected. This is especially true with landmark directions. "Turn on the dirt road next to the big faded big red barn, and then turn left at the house with the big tree in front." For some reason or another you think you only have a couple of miles to go to the house with the big tree in front – when in fact it's 10 or 12 miles.

After a couple of miles, what happens? You think, "Did I miss my turn?" Pretty soon you start to doubt yourself. This can't possibly be right. They would have told you if you had to go more than a couple of miles, wouldn't they?"

At that point, you began to doubt the directions, themselves – whether they were accurate enough, whether they were given to correctly, why they couldn't just give you some distances and cardinal directions. As the miles mount the temptation mounts to stop paying attention to these directions. The temptation to turn around became more powerful. "I must have missed the turn," you think. You even consider the cardinal sin of "men-behind-the-wheel" – stopping and asking for directions.

And it was that interval of not knowing whether you were in the right spot or not that was particularly aggravating. Has that ever happened to you? It turned out that the directions were fine. Oh, they could have been more detailed, sure. But they weren't wrong. The reason you get all mixed up was because you put something into the directions that was not there. You had decided – for no good reason – that the distance to the house with the big tree in front had to be less than it really was.

Christian life is like that. God gives us His Word in Holy Scripture. He makes plain the way of salvation. Yet, for whatever reason we develop our own ideas and expectations as to how God should lead us, how He should communicate with us, and how He should deal with us. We begin to prescribe to God how we want Him to guide us through life. And when it doesn't turn out that way, we begin to doubt His abilities, His wisdom, even His love.

We want God's direction and guidance in our lives, but we want it revealed in obvious and convenient ways. That's basically what happened to Peter in the Gospel story. He wanted to follow Christ's direction. He wanted to trust God, but he forgot that it might prove difficult. And so, after Peter asks, Jesus directs him to step out of the boat and onto the water.

By the way, have you ever wondered why Peter wanted to go out to Jesus? It's kind of a strange thing to want to do in the middle of a storm. Was it to fulfill some lifelong fantasy to walk on water? He was a fisherman, after all. It had to have crossed his mind on slow fishing days as he gazed across the sea, "It sure would be nice if you could walk on water." You've probably thought that. Or, I wonder, was it pure boldness of faith – that impulsive faith Peter had? Is that what caused him to want to jump out of the boat? Either way, it took faith to step out.

Anyway, once Peter was out there, and standing there – held up only, by the power of Christ's Word – he started to have second thoughts. Apparently he thought it was going to be easier than he expected. What he discovered was that the waves were still crashing, the wind was still blowing, and the boat was getting farther away. What he discovered was that faith can be hard.

And that takes us back to what I was saying before. When faith gets hard, we start to have second thoughts about God. We start to second guess whether His Word is right or reliable – whether His directions are correct. We decide then, it is time that we intervene to get where we want to be. Sometimes it comes out in rather arrogant attitudes of heart. We want God's peace and serenity in our lives, but not with having to worship every week. We want financial peace of mind, but not with having to give back generously to God. We want to know God's will, but not with having to spend time reading or studying the Bible and praying for direction. We want to be rid of guilt, but not with actually having to confess that we are sinners. I mean – really a sinner. Sometimes it comes out in more desperate circumstances, when we feel like the world is swallowing us up. Kind of like Peter, as he began to sink. "Lord, save me!" he cried.

These are the times when we are not so sure that God's directions are reliable anymore. These are the times when faith starts to waver in the face of storm and wind": "Mom fell and she is in the hospital," or, "I'm sorry, but we just don't have hours to give, business is too slow. I

have to furlough you,” or, “Kids, please understand, we love you, but your mother and I just can’t live together anymore.”

There was once an absent-minded professor who became so absorbed in his work that he forgot the simplest details. One morning his wife said, “Now Henry, remember, we are moving today. So here, I’m putting this note in your pocket to remind you of our new address. Don’t forget.” The day passed by and the man came home to his house. He entered the front door, and found the place empty. Distraught, he walked out to the curb and sat down. A young boy walked up to him, and so he asked him, “Little boy, do you know the people who used to live here?” The boy replied, “Sure, Dad. Mom figured you’d forget, so she sent me out here to get you.”

Whether we like it or not, we all have a problem with spiritual absent-mindedness. We forget what God has promised us. We forget His great love for us. We forget that He is holding us up – and always has been. We forget the power of His grace. We forget what He has done for us. We forget to go to the cross and receive our power for living in a world of distractions and storms. You see, we need to understand something. Faith is hard. But, faith is hard, because we forget.

But here is where the grace of God shines most brilliantly. Like the hand extended to Peter, despite of our forgetfulness, God reaches out with His grace and forgiveness. Nothing stops Him. Not our sin, or our foolishness, or our prideful arrogance. It doesn’t matter how good our intentions were to start, or how much of a shambles we have made of our lives, God’s grace is there. His grace reaches out to us – here, in worship, in Scripture and Sacraments He is reminding us of the one thing we so easily forget. We have the cross! We have the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus at work in our lives!

That’s why Jesus said to Peter, “Why did you doubt?” We have the strength of Christ to endure the struggles of life. We can remain standing and walk through what looks to be impossible. We have the resurrection of Christ in us, which allows us to face any hardship or peril, victoriously. We have the inexhaustible forgiveness of the cross, which conquers guilt and death. We have living and abiding hope in the face of any darkness.

There's a story about a hospice nurse who thought she had seen the depth of God's grace applied to the lives of His children. She had helped countless people go through the dying process with their spouse or parent or child. But suddenly it hit much closer to home. It started when she fell and broke her elbow. Ten days later her father fell and broke his neck. After 35 days in the intensive care unit her father died.

A few weeks later her sister, who had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, was placed under hospice care. On Christmas Day this hospice nurse went home to help care for her own sister. Her sister's faith in Jesus was an inspiration to those around her. The day before her sister died, God's grace took on new depth. This nurse was amazed as Her sister said she wasn't afraid and was ready to be with the Lord.

When we are not so sure, when we are weary, when we are beginning to doubt, when we are becoming forgetful, we can count on the grace of God. We can count on our loving Lord to be there, reaching out to us to strengthen our faith. We can count on Him to encourage us that we are on the right path of salvation. When we place our trust in Him, He will give us the sure hope and peace that the world cannot give. The psalmist in Psalm 28 put it nicely into words, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me." In Jesus' name, Amen.