

“You Have Nothing To Fear”

Matthew 14:22-33

Preached at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Springfield, IL

Pentecost 13 - August 9 & 10, 2008

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

Fear and doubt are marvelous weapons to have in your arsenal... at least when it comes to the fallen world. For years despots like Joseph Stalin, Chairman Mao, and countless others ruled with an iron fist by exploiting the fears of their subjects. By manipulating that fear, they turned brother against brother, husband against wife, even children against parents. A good way to describe this is “sociopathic”. Biblically, this sort of behavior is nothing less than “satanic”.

Satan has a history of using fear and doubt as well. The first recorded words of the devil in the scriptures are of him playing up doubt: **“Did God actually say...?”** You see, the devil is always looking for an “in” - a way to drive you to unbelief, to doubt, to damnation. He is endlessly prowling **“...around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”** - never tiring, never ceasing. He seeks you. He seeks me. He seeks each and every one of us.

In this fallen world, the ammunition available to Satan is abundant. We have earthquakes and fires. We have thunderstorms, tornadoes, and hurricanes. We have terrorist attacks and crazed snipers and school shootings. On a large scale, these disasters drive fear and terror into the hearts of mankind. Satan uses this fear and this terror to wage war on God, always seeking to drive a wedge between God and the one made in His image, the one He loves, namely man; namely you.

I.

In our text, Satan wields his weapons, seeking to devour the disciples. Called by the very Son of God, they are on a mission - sent on ahead of Jesus across the water to the next battlefield. But in this fallen world even nature itself is used to work fear and despair in the hearts of men. There is a strong wind against them, driving up the waves and making their progress slow, unsteady, and perilous. They are now tormented with fear and anxiety as they try to make it safely to the other side.

While praying, our Lord sees their trouble. **“And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.”** In the hours just before dawn, he goes to them. They have struggled all night, desperately trying to get across. He won't let them be tormented until it's too late. As Lord of all creation, Jesus strides across the driven waves, quickly making his way to the boat.

And Satan strikes. For in their disquiet, the disciples have dropped their guard. They are desperate and have forgotten whom they are serving. As Jesus approaches, they cry out in terror. **“It is a ghost!”** Their fear is so great that they no longer even recognize their teacher, their Lord, the God-Man striding across the water to them. He who has command over all creation is coming to be with them, and they can do nothing but scream.

So what terrifies you? Each and every one of us provides ample opportunity for the devil to drive his wedge in. Yes, on a large scale every one of us has that fear of tornadoes, of fires, of terrorists, of criminals. But what about on a small scale? Satan doesn't need much to do His demonic work of separating us from God.

Are you terrified of getting up in front of co-workers and giving that presentation? What about getting up in front of your class at school? Are you petrified at the thought of not being right? Do you always have to be the one with the correct answer, even if you're not sure it's right? Are you mortified at the thought of telling the person you passed on the street about Jesus Christ, and what he's done for you? Are you terrified to come into the church, sit down with the Pastor, and confess your sin to him in order to receive absolution?

Each of these seemingly inconsequential fears are in fact a wide-open door for Satan to enter in and do his devilish work. He doesn't need much of an opening - only a slight crack. Satan thrives on the slightest fear. Do you not believe these words: **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”**? Satan is continually whispering in your ear **“Did God actually say..?”** He wants nothing more than for you to question what God says to you. Satan wants to use your fear. Instead of your fear of sin driving you into confession and the waiting arms of Jesus, Satan wants that fear to drive you away! Satan wants you to hear the words of God which say to you that Jesus has taken every last sin of the entire world upon himself and nailed them to the cross. Satan wants you to hear that on the third day Jesus was raised because all of the debt of sin had been paid for. Satan wants you to hear that in Christ, you have the gift of eternal life. Satan wants you to hear that he has been defeated by Christ. Satan wants you to hear all this... and then through fear of your sinfulness to not believe that it was all done for you and is freely given to you!

But Jesus has a Word for you, the same that He had for the disciples as he approached.

“Take heart (or have courage); it is I. Do not be afraid.” In this Word, Jesus drives the fear from the disciples’ hearts. Why? Because with these words they know that He is God. **“It is I”** is even better translated **“I Am”**, the same identification that God used with Moses; the personal name of God. Here, the disciples know they have nothing to fear, for God is with them. God is coming to them over the waves. Jesus is saying nothing else here than this:

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.

I. You have nothing to fear in me.

II. You have nothing to fear with me.

II.

Peter’s fear is gone. **“And Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ Jesus said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.”** But it’s still windy, it’s still storming, and Satan still prowls. And with fear again entering his heart, Peter doubts, and begins to sink into the sea. He cries out **“Lord, save me”**. In that moment, Jesus reaches out, takes hold of him, and rescues him from death and fear. **“And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.”**

Remember that Satan wants you to doubt to the point of unbelief. Satan wants nothing more than for you to say to yourself “God does not care whether I live or die, he does not care whether I am comfortable or frightened.” Satan wants you to turn away from God and trust in yourself to get through life. Satan, however, is the prince of lies. Satan wants nothing more than to claim your soul for himself. Satan wants you to think that God does not love you. The last thing Satan wants you to hear is this:

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” That’s right, just as Peter cried out in his moment of weakness and trembling at the wind and was saved, so too God has saved *you* from certain death through His own Son. In your moments of fear and doubt you *will* feel the breezy exhortations of the devil, bidding you to give up hope. But do not despair! Say to Satan “I’ve drowned already in the waters of my baptism!” Remember that you have been crucified with Christ and raised again in that cleansing bath. Recall that there, in those waters, Christ Himself bid you **“Come.”** just as he did St. Peter. And in being so rescued from the crushing torment of eternal death, know that truly He - Jesus - is the Son of God, just as those in the boat did. **“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”** This is most certainly true, regardless of Satan’s hot air. Thumb your nose at the devil, and rejoice in the words of the Psalmist: **“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”**

In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit... (Amen.)