**Take Heart, It Is I**

Based on [Matthew 14:22-33](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt14.22-33)

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There are two issues to the gospel lesson that will garner our attention today. First, what does Jesus reveal of himself in this gospel? and Second, what is the response of the disciples?

*After feeding the five-thousand, Jesus sent his disciples off into a boat, and went off by himself on a mountain to pray. When evening came, the boat was far off from land and the sea was windy and rough. Sometime between 3-6 am, Jesus came walking to them on the sea. The disciples saw him and were terrified thinking he was a ghost. But, he did not allow them to remain afraid, but spoke to them immediately saying, “****Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid****.”*

We are given to understand here that the disciples in the boat were anxious and tired. They had been fighting the wind on the sea until early in the morning. It is at this time that Jesus comes to them, in the dark and walking on the sea. In a human way, we cannot blame the disciples for their fright in thinking he was a ghost. After all, they had left their master on the shore Jesus who is flesh and blood, skin and bones. Jesus came in the flesh and he has weight and takes up space, buoyant as any human to float on the water, or even to swim…but surely not to hover above the water but a ghost or spirit?

Here Jesus, as usual, reveals the very heart of God to us. We must not believe our natural thoughts about God. By nature we are enemies of God, and we think he means us harm and is hostile towards us. And when his presence is manifest, terror strikes the conscience. From this perspective, God is little more than a specter, a supernatural terror. But Christ does not shame his disciples for not recognizing him, or rebuke their failure to see. Instead he corrects their blindness with a word, “**Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid**.”

The one thing that everyone in their heart knows about God is that He is powerful. Powerful enough to cause storms on the sea and powerful enough to stop them. God is sovereign enough to save some people and condemn others. He is big enough to fill the whole world, and yet small enough to be a single man, Jesus Christ. But knowledge of God’s sovereign power is no comfort to your conscience, unless you know what he thinks of you. **Even the demons believe in God’s sovereign power and they don’t rejoice about it, they shudder, because they know they are condemned.** The same goes for you. When your natural heart simply considers the awe, and majesty, and power and might of God, you only have reason to shudder and be terrified…because you are a worm and not a man, you are a sinful man and dwell amongst sinful people—and that doesn’t bode well for you. It is a fearful thing to stand in the presence of the living God.

This is why Jesus’ premier and primary message to the world--now that he has come into the world--is “**Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid**.” The disciples were afraid of the wind and the waves, and when they thought an unfamiliar spirit was coming to them they forgot their earthly danger and faced supernatural terrors. So Jesus *immediately* speaks a word of comfort. He says “**Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid**.” “It is I, your loving Lord who comes to you, who has repeatedly demonstrated his kindness to you…and I come to you now walking on the recesses of the deep (Job 38:16). Not only do I have the supernatural spiritual power of God almighty, and I am with you, and I am for you. Do not be afraid.”

This is one of many not-so-subtle ways that Jesus reveals himself in his Word to be their God and ours. He commands them to trust in him, to put their faith in him, to believe that not even the depth of the sea can separate him from them. That’s a good thing too, because he is Immanuel--God with us--and so we need fear no earthly thing. His death has conquered hell and death, his resurrection prepared a place for us in heaven, and his ascension means that right now Jesus Christ in the flesh fills heaven and earth and rules all things—in heaven, on earth, and over the sea--as our Lord, our savior, and our friend.

And it is not just the disciples on the sea to whom Jesus says “**Take heart, It is I, do not be afraid**.” He offers these words to anyone who is terrified of earthly dangers and yet too terrified of God to seek His protection; it is to him Christ has this eternal gospel: “**Take heart, It is I, do not be afraid.**” (1) Do not be afraid of death. I have destroyed death. Trust in my resurrection and you shall never die. **(2) Do not be afraid of your sins. I have paid for them. Trust in my forgiveness and you shall never be put to shame.**  (3) Do not be afraid of the world. I have overcome the world. Trust in my kingdom and you shall inherit heaven. (4) Do not fear the devil. I have bound up the devil and cast him out (John 12:31). Resist him firm in your faith and he will flee from you. “**Take heart, It is I who is with you, even to the end of the age, Do not be afraid**.”

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Once Peter hears Jesus words he answers him, “**Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water**.” Here Peter displays a bold faith, an unfettered confidence in his Lord. This faith is not his own doing, but a product of Jesus words, “**It is I, do not be afraid**.” These words made him so eager to be with Jesus that he wanted to come to him, even over the raging sea.

And the desire Peter has to come to Jesus is not impatience, or rashness; it is a truly pious desire as the Lord commands elsewhere in many places of scripture: “**Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Ask and it will be given you, seek and you shall find.” “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God**.”

“**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**.” We see here this general rule: That when we realize that we are with God and under his protection, our sin bids us to turn our head back to the world, to find new things to fear and believe God has left us all over again. So when Peter gets over his fear of a ghost and finds instead the comfort of Jesus, he thinks he can once again face the dangers of the world on his own courage. He is immediately proven wrong.

This is a perpetual problem within certain strains of Christianity...a frightful teaching that your faith in Jesus only gets you in his kingdom, but it is your works, your striving, your loving efforts to love God, deny yourself and help those around you that keeps you there. It is true that a perfect faith would never take its eyes off of Jesus. But no one is perfect, but Jesus. Not even saint Paul who said, “***Not that I am already perfect***, but I press on to make it my own, because Jesus Christ has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12).

We daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment. Had perfection been required, Peter’s grand act of faith in following Jesus’ command and coming to him on the water would have ended a tragedy. He would have looked to the wind and sunk in failure and shame with no one to help. **Instead, he still had the faith, the imperfect and nevertheless saving faith to call out, “Lord, save me**”. And Jesus didn’t repeat his command, he didn’t say “Come again”, he didn’t say “You can do it Peter”, he didn’t coach him for swimming lessons. No, “**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**” And here is perhaps the greatest comfort, we are justified by grace through faith, even imperfect little weak faith. If it is a faith that knows to call upon Jesus as Lord, it is a faith that immediately rescues you from the abyss and raises you to Christ.

Martin Luther once wrote a famous line to a friend who, to my understanding, was doubting in some way his ability to do the right thing in a matter. Luther said to him, “**Be a sinner, and sin boldly, but believe even more boldly in Christ who is victorious...**” These words have caused great scandal because they appear to be encouraging sin. If they mean to anything of value it would be this, when Jesus instructs you to come out of the boat to Him, don’t neglect to do so because you might turn your head for a moment and sink. Should that happen, call out to him and he will immediately save you.

If Christ commands a husband and wife to be fruitful and multiply, don’t refuse to have children because you might fail as parents. Rather, when you fail, remember to call upon Christ for help. Not only will he rescue you--that is, forgive your failure--but he will also give you his Spirit to carry out your vocation. But that is not “sinning boldly,” it is simply vocation, doing what God has called you to do. Carrying out our God-given duties will never cause us to lose our salvation, nor put you to shame. “**Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith**” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

In conclusion, Jesus shows us the heart of God and his attitude to us. He reveals himself as a God who does not wish to condemn you, but to save you, guide you, protect and preserve you and for this reason he deserves our worship, saying “**Truly, you are the Son of God**.” The scripture also shows us the life of the Christian; that we live our lives by faith not by sight. Fixing our eyes of faith on Jesus we will never be put to shame. This is the sign of a great faith, a strong faith, a faith that will find contentment in this life and a permanent home in the next. But should your faith be weak, and you become frightened by the dangers of the world or the wrath of God, even a little faith will cry out to Jesus and be saved. “**Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved**.”