

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, August 27, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Man Overboard!”

READING: Matthew 14:25-33 – During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reach out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

If you heard my sermon on August 18, you heard me tell about losing my fishing rod and reel to a fish that yanked the whole thing overboard while I was busy helping my partner land his fish. I heard the rattle but paid it no mind. When I turned to take up my rod, it was gone. Deep sixed. Sunk!

What I haven’t told many people is the rod and reel were not the only thing I lost overboard during our week in the Canadian wilds: I lost my boat partner overboard! His name is Dennis Sergeant. We fished together all week with much success and with much *bon homme*, but on Monday afternoon as we were heading out to go fishing once again, we had a little hiccup. Dennis was running the motor and I was seated up on the front seat. As we rounded “The Point” and the speed increased, I thought I would sit myself on the center bench seat to give us a lower center of gravity and to avoid being bounced so hard when we slapped into the waves. It wasn’t a bad idea, but I should have warned Dennis before I made the move.

As I slipped back onto the center bench my movement changed the balance of the boat. At the same moment we had the misfortune of encountering my brother Alan’s wake. Before either of us could adjust, the bow went up high, the boat dipped low on the left side, I was thrown back and into the bottom of the boat, water came rushing over the side, and Dennis, fearing a swamping, rolled out of the boat on the right side.

I lay in the bottom of the boat a bit stunned and wondering how to get myself back up on the seat. I looked back over my shoulder to see what Dennis thought only to find no Dennis in the boat! I raised myself up and looked to my right, and there was Dennis treading water. I shouted, “Are you okay?” He said he was, and I could see another one of our boats already heading toward him, having seen the whole thing take place. I went to work bailing water out of the stern, reconnecting the gas line, and figuring out how to run the motor without the “kill switch key”. (That’s a little key attached to a coiled line which was attached on the other end to Dennis. When he went overboard, he pulled the key with him, and the kill switch turned off the motor.) The other boat towed Dennis to shallow water where I came and picked him up. No harm, no foul! We took A LOT of kidding the rest of the week, but it was a stark reminder how quickly things can go wrong. Vigilance, always vigilance!

So it was with the disciples as they toiled with the oars on their lake. The wind and the waves came up suddenly and turned their quiet cruise into a fight for their lives. Suddenly they saw a figure moving across the surface. The only explanation that came to them was, “It’s a ghost!” Fear and panic ensued, until a familiar voice said, “Take courage. It’s I. Don’t be afraid.” They knew that voice. They should have taken comfort in that voice and in those words, but Peter wants proof. “If it is you, bid me come to you on the water!” Bold words, don’t you think?

Jesus replies with but one word, "Come." Give Peter some credit; he alone steps out of that boat and walks a few steps on the water. He does more than most. But he makes the mistake that we also all too often make: he took his eyes off of Jesus. As soon as he looked elsewhere, he was in trouble. All he could see were the dangers, and down he went. "Lord, save me!" he cries. Man overboard! How quickly things turned for him.

We can also be like Peter. We can take our eyes off of our Savior and then all we see are our troubles. Then we find ourselves sinking into despair, depression, or panicked responses that take us only deeper. How good it is to hear his voice and his words, "Do not be afraid." Those words are his most used imperative command across all four Gospels. That's not by accident. Jesus came to allay our fears, calm our spirits, and call us to faith. He has already seen to our eternal salvation. We can put our trust and hope in him for the rest of our needs as well.

While my rod and reel went to the bottom, thankfully Dennis did not. Give him credit: he got right back into that boat with me and we fished for four more days together. The others teased him about trying to "walk on water." He just smiled and said, "My name isn't Peter but the results were the same." Peter had to learn to trust the voice of Jesus, and he did. We also need to be reminded sometimes that when we feel like we're sinking, we can call, "Lord, save me!" and Jesus will reach out and catch us. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) Grace on Wednesday started last week. Class number two is tomorrow night. Classes for preschoolers to adults are available. Bring the young ones in your family. Supper is at 5:30; classes are 6-7:30.
- 2) SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 is a BIG DAY! We will celebrate our 50th year in our Sanctuary with a CONGREGATIONAL PICTURE to be taken between the services. Want every possible member to be there around 9:15. After late service the Elders will serve their BBQ. Come!