

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

A DRESS REHEARSAL

Matthew 14:22-33

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

DIAGNOSIS: Torment

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *The Troika Torments*

Winds, waves, and water batter the disciples, “tormenting” (the Greek word used) them as they try to get to the opposite shore (where Jesus told them to go, where the gentiles are). If this troika overwhelms their boat, they will die. Likewise, people today (including those huddled inside the “naves” of our churches) are tormented by hostile, lethal forces (economic/political fallout, disease, addictions, disasters, etc.) over which they have little/no control. The possibility of “going under” in every sense, is very real.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Troika Terrifies*

Typically, the response to such torment is the same as Peter’s: extreme fright (v. 30). The disciples are so focused on the tormenting forces that they completely fail to recognize Jesus as he walks towards them and they mistake him for a ghost (v. 26). Worse, they fail to catch the clues that equate him with God (the fact that he walks on water, that he uses the words *ego iama* to identify himself). Their problem runs deep, as Jesus explains, they are “little-faiths,” doubters (v. 31). Likewise present-day disciples who focus exclusively on the forces that torment them become so fearful that they too “doubt” Jesus and do not recognize Him as God-come-to-their-rescue.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Troika Terminates*

Little-faith Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink (v. 30), and the troika of wind, waves, and water triumphs. Likewise little-faiths of today, focused on and fearful of the tormenting forces rather than on God and the One he sends, are overwhelmed and drowned by those very forces. Most terrifying is that the Creator of those forces is the One managing their demise.

PROGNOSIS: Rescue

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Troika Trounced*

Sinking Peter desperately cries out, “Lord, save me!” and wave-walking Jesus grabs hold of him and pulls him out (v. 31). Voila! The wind stops, the waves and water are de-powered. This could be a dress rehearsal portending the stunning finale about to commence in Jerusalem not too long later. There, Jesus will walk all over death as he comes to the rescue of (surprise, surprise!) a worldwide audience that morphs from spectators into active participants in this divine drama. They will marvel at the mercy evidenced by this tour de force and gasp at how it plays out: Jesus will submit to the troika, be overcome and drowned into the depth of hell, then make a stunning reappearance three days later.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *The Troika Traded*

As Peter et al are rescued by Jesus and the forces are deflated, a bolt of recognition hits them: “Truly, you are the Son of God” (v. 33), they exclaim, and they worship him. One can picture Peter tightly grabbing Jesus’ hands, finally trusting him to keep him above water. Likewise, audience-participants of the Grand Finale grab onto Jesus, the incredible Death-Trampler, and in faith, trust him to walk them over and through their own deaths.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Trampling the Troika*

While Peter focuses on Jesus, he loses his fear, gets out of the boat and walks on water with Jesus (v. 29). Likewise, current audience-participants who focus on and hold tightly to Jesus, lose their fear of the terrifying forces and actually defy them. Rather than being self-absorbed, they, like their Lord, become

other-absorbed, and they join him in reaching out to the myriads of terrified flounders around them. They throw out their lifelines of witness, "Look there! Grab hold of Jesus!" and then they proceed "to the other side" where Jesus sends them.