

# Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

**TAKE HEART, IT IS I**

**Matthew 14:22-33**

**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Paige G. Evers**

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

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Wave-Battered**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Forgetful***

Right before this story takes place, the disciples, along with 5,000 men, plus women and children, ate from the feast Jesus made out of five loaves of bread and two fish (14:13-21). Then Jesus immediately sent them all away, the disciples to get in a boat, and the crowds to return to their towns. But how quick the disciples are to forget what they've just seen Jesus do. They get into the boat as Jesus directed. But before they reach the other side of the sea, the wind starts going against them. Their boat is battered by the waves. We read earlier in Matthew that the disciples have been stuck in a boat in a storm before (7:23-27). That time, Jesus was with them and he saved them. How quick they forgot that, too. We're no different. When faced with tough external forces such as storms, wind, waves, financial problems, relationship troubles, or you name it, it starts to feel like everything is against us. We let those external forces take over. Our behavior is shaped by our reactions to them.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Terrified***

Matthew doesn't mention the disciples' fear until they see Jesus walking toward them on the water. They see the one who just fed them and a crowd of thousands. They see the one who calmed the storm when they previously were all together in a boat. And when they see him now, walking on the sea, they are terrified. Thinking he's a ghost, they cry out in fear. Even Peter, after gathering up his courage and walking out on the water to Jesus, starts to focus on the wind and then becomes afraid. When he responds to Peter's cry, Jesus names the problem: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v. 31). The disciples are captivated by fear and by their focus on external forces. Jesus diagnoses that their hearts have very little room for faith.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Alone***

Whether it's clinging to the side of a boat or spending hours pouring over household budgets, the deeper problem is the same: a lack of faith. And when we lack faith, we close ourselves off from God and from his help. The disciples were terrified when they saw something like a ghost walking toward them on the water. When Peter saw the waves, he became frightened and started to sink. But their fear in these situations cannot compare to where such unfaith, left unchecked, leads for God. God has no patience, only wrath, for such faithlessness. And, without God, to whom do we cry out to for help?

## **PROGNOSIS: Lifted**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Caught***

Just as Jesus diagnoses Peter's problem of having "little faith," Jesus also offers the solution to that problem and to the deeper malady of being separated from God. In response to the disciples' cries of fear, Jesus declares, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (v. 27). In Greek, his statement is, "ego eimi" or "I am," the name by which God identifies himself (in Hebrew) in Exodus 3:14. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God. He is the one with divine authority. He is the one whom God sent to take on the disciples' fear, sin, and death and conquer them once and for all. Our doubt doesn't change who Jesus is. Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter as he started to sink in the waves (v. 31). In the same way, Jesus stretched out his hands on the cross to catch hold of sinners. And in his Son's death and resurrection, God raises them up to forgiveness and new life.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Wave-Riding***

There is a hint of the disciples' change of heart from fear to trust when Jesus and Peter join the others back in the boat. Just as the wind ceased (v. 32), so peace, calm, and trust took hold in the disciples' hearts. Instead of fearing the waves,

they now rode them, knowing that Jesus would not let them go. Free of fear they turn their attention away from themselves.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Leaving the Boat***

After that calm moment in the boat, the disciples could not contain their new-found trust in Jesus to their hearts. Facing the one who miraculously fed them, saved them from the storm not once but twice, and told them to not be afraid because he was with them, they worshiped him. “Truly you are the Son of God,” (v. 33) they confessed. The last few verses of this story (vv. 34-36) aren’t contained in the lectionary passage. But they are helpful because they emphasize that the good news that Jesus is the Son of God could not be contained to that small boat, or to the disciples alone, either. The boat lands at Gennesaret and the people there recognize Jesus. They send word throughout the region and bring all the sick to him. All who touched even the fringe of his cloak were healed, or saved (Greek: diasozo), just as Peter was saved (Greek: sozo) when Jesus rescued him from the waves. For all of those who are touched by Jesus and his death and resurrection, external forces—whether waves, illnesses, or hardships—don’t have the last word. Jesus does. And those he saves and heals, he sends, so others may hear the great news that because of what God has done, they can take heart, trust in Jesus, and not be afraid.