

# Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

## DROWNING, THEN DRIPPING

Matthew 14:22-33

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## Analysis by Eric W. Evers

22 Immediately he 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: Sunk

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Opposed*

“Battered by the waves... the wind was against them... he [Peter] noticed the strong wind” (vv. 24, 30). These are not hopeful circumstances. Wind and waves, unpredictable forces, impinge upon the disciples. They can’t get to where Jesus sent them. Peter’s having a hard time following through on Jesus’ invitation to dance on the sea. External realities are bogging them down; the chaos of the deep seems to be ruling the day for them.

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Unseeing*

But the disciples demonstrate that it is not merely “stuff” holding them back. It is their own lack of sight and vision. Their Master is before them, yet the disciples see a ghost. The Savior has called him, but Peter “notices” the “strong wind” more than he does Jesus. (Odd that he would see wind more clearly than the person standing before him, isn’t it?) Yes, they are in difficult conditions. But Jesus is right there with them, striding as the Lord over the waves. But this just leaves them more terrified (v. 26); even when Peter gets the “proof” he wants, he still pays more attention to the wind and water than the Lord.

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Going under*

If only it were a case of “they couldn’t see,” though. In reality, as Peter’s demand shows, it’s more like “they would not see.” They have Jesus’ word: “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” (v. 27). But that’s not enough: “Lord, if it is you...” (v. 28). Jesus, as he comes to them, doesn’t satisfy the disciples. They’re not content with Jesus’ promise. And that’s the real problem. Seeking God apart from his revealed Word (in this text, Jesus the Word made flesh as well as his verbal promise) means demanding God do things our way. It means setting

oneself against how God wants to be known, and thus against God himself. We will not fare well in such an adventure. The hidden God, the God-sought-apart-from-Christ, is not a God who saves. A quest for such a God gains us only abandonment to wrath, and leaves us flailing in a sea of chaos, where we will drown without hope, doomed.

## **PROGNOSIS: Soaked**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal solution)** – *He Plunged in to Pull Us out*

But Christ came to rescue drowned sinners. The Old Adam or Eve (or Peter?), who wants God apart from how God gives himself to us, drowns in wrath; Christ raises up a new creation, pulling out of the seas people who cling to him, the revealed God, by faith. He does this not from some comfortable distance, but by plunging into the very suffering and death that entraps us. As the righteous one, Jesus “plunged” willingly into a sinner’s death on the cross, in order to pull new saints into life. We who were opposed to God have been pulled out of the waves, no longer dripping death, but soaked by forgiving grace.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *He Steadies the Seas*

When you are grasped by Jesus, or in other words, when your ears are opened to hear his promise of “it is I; do not be afraid” with faith, the external circumstances that once opposed us no longer define our reality. For the disciples in this episode, the waves suddenly stopped, but Jesus’ presence did not always mean an end to struggle for them, just as it does not for us. But if God is “for us,” as can only be grasped by faith in Christ, then the chaos of the waves no longer threatens to destroy us. The grace that restores our relationship with God saturates all of life, steadying the seas and stilling life’s boat.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Worshipping Wet***

And this leads to confession: “Truly you are the Son of God” (v. 33). Such words are worship addressed to Jesus; but they are also proclamation passed on to us, and by the Spirit, through us, to the world in which we live. Praise is generated, not by our hearts, but by what Jesus has done by plunging in, grabbing hold of us, and making us his. But praise, like water sloshing around a boat, isn’t easily contained. Yes, it is directed Christ-ward, but as the fact that we still read this account today shows, it spreads as a confession for those other floundering swimmers around us to hear.