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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Christ's Command Creates Courage: "Come!"

Matthew 14:22-33

INI

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior who calls to us; who has come to us today in His holy Word. Amen.

Matthew 14:22–33

²² Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

²⁹ So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

We pray, dear Lord Jesus, teach us to know You. Amen.

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

Courage.

What makes a King out of a slave? Courage.

What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage.

What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist or the dusky dusk?

What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage.

What makes the Sphinx the 7th Wonder? Courage.

What makes the dawn come up like THUNDER?! Courage.
What makes the Hottentot so hot? Courage.
What puts the "ape" in ape-ricot? Courage.
Whatta they got that I ain't got? Courage. You can say that again!

As a Christian, what makes you feel like the cowardly lion? Whatta they got that I ain't got? In the story, *the Wizard of Oz*, the cowardly lion came to the wizard in search of one thing: courage. Here he was a lion, supposed king of the forest; here he was the king of all beasts, yet here he was, scared of Dorothy's little puppy, Toto.

I felt a little cowardly myself, as I stood with one foot on, one foot off. Not too far from the church where I grew up there was a swinging bridge. We were living in Austin, MN, and near the church where my father was pastor there was a park. My sister and her friend were bold enough to venture out onto that bridge, but not me. I stood, one foot on, one foot off, looking down to the river flowing by 500 feet below – actually it was probably only 50 feet, and it was just a creek, but to me it was like I was standing on the Golden Gate bridge during the great San Francisco earth quake of 1906.

There teetering in the wind before me was the swinging bridge. There were my sister and her friend – bounding out, grabbing a hold of the chain link rails and shaking it back and forth, laughing. With its chain linked railings and thinly spaced wooden planks, it was too out of control for me. There I was, the guy with one foot on, one foot off, without the courage to go further.

There are fears that disable us as Christians too. These are not about a fear of heights, these are not about a fear of public speaking. No, rather these are the sort of fears that keep us from doing what we should be doing as Christians – it is a "one foot on, one foot off, looking down" type of fear. All while the world is out there on that shaky bridge, telling you to toughen up, find your inner strength, take control of your life. To what wizard can we go to find what we lack?

Perhaps the greatest fear that we all face is the fear of losing control. But we do not look within to find what we lack; rather we look out, and we see a figure. We see Him standing out there on that bridge, out there on that water. He stands out in that place where you know you'll lose control and says those words written in red ink: "Come." "Come," He says to Peter. "Come," He says to you. Christ's command creates courage.

Today we look at this in two ways, drawing off the perspective of Peter: (1) His command creates courage to overcome the fear of uncertainty, and (2) His command creates courage to face the fear of suffering and loss.

1. To overcome the fear of uncertainty

Jesus had left them out there alone. While He remained safe on land praying by himself, they were drifting further and further from shore. And they did not feel so safe. Now they are more than a mile from shore and a storm was brewing.

Matthew describes the waves as bashing against the boat. Poush! Poush! the waves were shaking the boat as they tried to turn the sails for shore. However the wind was against them and it was all they could do to keep from drifting further away from land, away from Jesus. They were filled with uncertainty. They were losing control.

This went on for hours, until... "He came to them." A mystic figure approaches in the misty mist of life's dark dusk. But who could this be? Who is it that defies the laws of nature? No flesh and blood feet can walk on water? It must be an apparition, a vision, a ghost. They cry out in fear, they cry out from uncertainty.

Maybe your experience is not at sea so far from shore. It is something closer to home. And although it may be so close to home, it seems God is so far away. There is an uncertain future, an unanswered question, a need to call for help, but the fear of losing control if you do. You have one foot on, one foot off, and know you don't have the courage to go further.

A child may find this happens when starting a new school or trying to make new friends. From one direction his parents are forcing him out into a place he does not want to go; from another direction he imagines the ghostly figure that lies ahead: he imagines the kids that will tease him because he dresses differently, a teacher who will not understand he is behind when it comes to math, a class which just won't like him. Of course these fears are only in his head, but experience has shown, these things happen. He's sees his parents pushing him out onto the bridge and other kids who are already out there laughing and having fun without him. He knows he doesn't have the courage to go forward.

A Christian grown up might find something similar. Something is pushing you from behind into a place you don't want to go; and all the while the wind is against you. You imagine the ghostly figure of what lies ahead and the cost of being a Christian is suddenly too great. The changes that need to happen in your life will cost you too greatly. You are losing control, fighting the waves which are bashing against you and you don't have the courage to go onward. The disciples cry out in fear.

But who is truly the shadowy figure who approaches in the misty mist of life's dark dusk? You've gone on for far too long fighting against it, until ... He speaks to you saying: "Take courage. I AM He. Be not afraid."

That figure you imagined to be so fearful in your uncertainty, turns out to be the most certain figure you could ever imagine. It is no ghost as you feared; those are flesh and blood feet which walk on water. The one who defines the laws of nature, now defies them.

He says literally, "Take courage. I AM." The voice which speaks echoes the words of the burning bush. The unchanging one who says to Moses, tell my children: "I AM who I AM." This is the voice of the LORD. – the voice of Him who calls all things into existence, the voice which laid the foundations of the earth; these are the feet of Him who has walked the depths of the sea; the hands which have fixed the limits of the creation.

Take courage. Realize that the figure who stands in your uncertain future is Christ and no other. Peter steps out of that boat into uncertainty – and why? What compels him to go forward? The word stands out in red ink in my Bible: "Come." The voice assures Peter that this is Jesus who walks toward them and he knows because of His command.

There are uncertainties in life which for good reason should cause us to take careful steps. There is a sensible reason why I didn't want to venture out on that swinging bridge. If I recall correctly that bridge was eventually condemned by the city. I had good reason to hesitate, to fear those uncertain steps. You see, Christ was not out on that bridge saying: "Come." And for that reason, a Christian should pause.

This is what makes all the difference in the world. Where Christ has not spoken, we should be cautious. Where the world is emboldened to rock the boat and shake the bridge and tell you to make your life what you want it to be – we have reason to pause and consider who is speaking and where this will take me.

As we gaze into the choices that need to be made for the future, we ask the question Peter asks: "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You." We look to His word to understand our callings.

The situation in which I find Christ responding is when one of those bridge planks breaks, and I see my sister hanging on for dear life. Then that bridge becomes the place where Christ's word calls us. It is not about proving how brave you are by boldly

bounding out on to the bridge. It is about those moments where we find our neighbor in need. Don't leave her out there. Don't say, well, you got yourself there in the first place, you can get yourself out. Don't fear the shaky bridge. See the figure who stands out there in the middle of our fears and hear His Word. It stands out in red letters in my Bible, v.29: "Come."

This is the courage of everyday Christian callings: "Come." As a child ventures into that classroom knowing Christ is with him; as parents deal patiently and in a caring way with a child who is scared – the red letters stand out: "Come." As Christians face difficult changes in their life, an uncertain future, but turn to the Word of God for strength – the red letters stand out: "Come."

Lose control, step out of that boat, and believe: His command creates courage to lose control and to face the fear of uncertainty.

2. To face the fear of suffering and loss

The words come to Job from the midst of a storm: "Here your proud waves must stop!" In Job chapter 38, God speaks from the midst of a storm and addresses a Christian who is riddled with fear and doubt. Job was a riddled with fear, a fear of losing control. His fear stemmed from the suffering he was facing. There is another fear that plagues us; it leaves us drowning in our own attempt to control things. Christian's face the fear of suffering and loss and in such times, it is Christ's command creates courage.

Job was stricken with suffering, and for all he could tell, it was for no apparent reason. And Job's friends were little help. From the perspective of Job's friends, God is unmerciful: Job is getting what he deserves. They figure Job must have done some wicked thing to have been stricken with such affliction and loss. From the perspective of Job on the other hand, God is unjust. Job has made all the right choices; he has deserved none of this. So he says: "As God lives, who has taken away my justice, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter ... my righteousness I hold fast and will not let it go ... Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, that my prosecutor had written a book! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder, and bind it on me like a crown; I would declare to Him the number of my steps; Like a prince I would approach Him."

Job was trying to keep control of the situation. To face the fear of suffering and loss is to lose control. Suffering and death strip us of the control we thought we once had, which ultimately we never really had to begin with. His friends say God is unmerciful; Job says God is unjust; and both are really afraid. They are afraid of losing control. They

look down to that creek hundreds of feet below, and want to prove that the answer to what troubles them lies within themselves.

We like to be in control. We like the idea that the healthcare option we select, the diet we eat, the exercise we do, the wise financial decisions we make, the spouse we choose, the discipline we use with our children, the choices are the things that will make us healthy, wealthy, and wise. But what happens when we start to lose control? What happens when we get very sick, when we get an unexpected injury that affects our job, when the spouse we choose is not acting like the spouse we chose them to be, when our children are not acting the way we have taught them to act – what happens when we think we've taken all the precautions, made all the right choices, and suddenly we find ourselves sinking, drowning, and in need of rescue?

What happens when a west african nation is forced to shutdown because a disease has taken control? If you have not been watching the news lately, maybe you should. Already more than 1700 people across three countries have been infected with the Eboli epidemic. They say that Eboli is a disease that spreads fear faster than it infects. 930 have already died forcing the World Health Organization to label this a public health emergency. The fear of suffering and loss is escalating. Should we panic?

There are, of course, many reasons not to panic – the CDC knows this disease well; they have prepped medical staff; they have prepared containment facilities; they have briefed airports on how to deal with the disease. However, these are not the reasons a Christian takes courage. It is not about having things under control. As much as we give thanks for the gift of good health care, there are many Christians in the world who do not have such comfort. In the end, we should realize that the choices we make do not keep things under control. “Here your proud waves must stop!”

The reason a Christian takes courage is because those feet are made of flesh and blood. Those feet which walk on water are human feet – Peter timidly steps out of the boat – sploosh. Another step ... sploosh. Peter steps out of the boat with human feet and his focus is up. He doesn't look down, but keeps His focus on the voice of Jesus. The wind thunders across the water and here and there water spritzes against his face. He's come so far only to realize how far he's come. He begins to notice how strong the wind is; he begins to notice the waves heaving all around. And his focus slowly shifts. No longer is He looking up at Jesus; now he's looking down and realizing that this is impossible – with one foot forward and one foot turning back, Peter begins to sink.

Job wasn't right. Job's friends weren't right. They were looking down, looking within, just like Peter. And as soon as Peter starts to look at himself or his surroundings for

assurance in troubling times, he begins to sink. God proves something – we aren't in control. And that is ok.

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

We aren't in control, and that is ok. That is ok, because those feet are made of flesh and blood. And that is a human hand which comes to the rescue. Jesus reaches down without hesitation and catches Peter. Jesus walks on water.

Jesus proves, He is in control. His body is flesh and blood and He gives it willingly to save us. Those feet which have walked the depths of the deep, now carry the cross for you; those hands which have fastened the corners of creation are now fastened to the cross; those arms which are so quick to grab you when you've let go are so quickly raised toward heaven for you. He gives His hands, His feet, His body, His soul to save you. He has saved you from drowning in your own sins, He will surely not let you go now. You are at peace with the God of all creation – "Why did you doubt?"

He rescues us from suffering; he rescues us from death; and in His resurrection He creates courage. God proves He has control over all things – even death itself. He gets into the boat, and steps into your heart and all is truly calm.

You may think you are like the cowardly lion sometimes – but take courage. Eventually the cowardly lion discovers that what he needed, he had all along. He just needed his friends to show him. There are Christians all around you – here to show you that what you lack, you've had all along – Jesus. Hear the voice which is written in red ink: "Come."

What makes a Christian doctor brave enough to venture into that tent filled with Eboli? What makes him bold to risk his own health and life in order to help someone who is sick and dying? There in that tent is Christ calling to him. There in that tent is His vocation – Christ's command: "Come." Maybe, God will use you to echo that voice and extend that hand toward someone else who is in need. Maybe God will give you the courage to walk on water. And so we respond with awe: "Truly this is the Son of God."

Jesus.

What makes a king out of a slave? Jesus.

What makes the calm amid the waves? Jesus.

What make the Christian bold to trust in the misty mist of life's dark dusk? Jesus.

What makes us know that God is just? Jesus.

What makes the depths an endless wonder? Jesus.

What makes the skies a voice of thunder? Jesus.
Who walks on water as if on land? Jesus.
Who bids you come with one command? Jesus.
Who rescues You with His own hand? Jesus.
Whatta you got? Jesus. You can say that again.

Amen.