

## Proper 14

*Matthew 14:22-33*

*"I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him" (from our psalm this morning).*

Children dare each other to do things all the time as part of their regular play. These games strengthen the ego identity of the darer and challenge the courage of the one dared. Dares always involve some relationships between the parties involved. Usually, the dare is innocent enough. Sometimes it means dire consequences. For example, often, college hazing consists of a dare – chug too much alcohol or drive too fast – that can result in bodily injury or even death. When the dare includes potential harmful consequences, then it ceases to be a game that can strengthen ego or courage.

In this Sunday's gospel, Jesus' actions seem to dare Peter to see and believe. Jesus' command, "*Come*" challenges more than Peter's courage – it is an opportunity for Jesus' self-revelation, "*it is I,*" that calls forth faith from Peter. At first glance, Peter fails miserably in both courage and faith. The two are not unrelated.

This gospel selection follows immediately upon last Sunday's episode of healing and feeding the five thousand, which Chris so preached last week. Surely by now, the disciples know who Jesus is! Why do they not recognize their teacher when Jesus walks toward them on the water? This Jesus whom they have seen heal and work other miracles now walks on the stormy sea – Jesus even has the power over nature and, by implication, over the evil that the stormy seas symbolize.

When Peter dares Jesus to reveal who Jesus is by asking Jesus to command Peter to come to Jesus on the water, it is not only Jesus' identity that is at stake but Peter's faith. Peter's moment of pause, "*if it is you,*" results in disastrous fright. Peter drops all pretensions of courage and cries out to be saved.

Only Jesus can remove the stumbling blocks that keep us from recognizing how Jesus is and come. Here is why Peter's dare to Jesus is so exposing. Jesus' identity is assured, Jesus saves Peter. Peter's and, for that matter, our faith, is still weak, still needs to be strengthened.

The good news of this gospel is that those moments of doubt do not have lead to drowning but to homage. Doubt, then, is not a contradiction to faith but a call for faith to be strengthened. A very wise clergy, Cherry Livingston, "The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is certainty."

By doubting, calling out, and being saved Peter, the disciples in the boat, and us, all of us, acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Here doubt led to Jesus' self-revelation, which brought forth homage. Homage is an act whereby we recognize who God is – the one who has power over nature, evil, and who always wills to save us.

We all had experienced storms in our lives when things seemed especially hopeless when the pressure is on to compromise our values and integrity when we are sinking in anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, and confusion. Perhaps during this pandemic, you are feeling, just like me, the weight of the world on your shoulders. Tensions heightened, hurtful words exchanged, people are trying desperately to be right, and seeking to get the upper hand at someone's expense. As we grow closer to this election, we will be surrounded by the storms of words, chaos, noise, constant advertisements, screaming, social media posting, and those seeking to gain and keep our attention on things of this world and not of God. But Jesus, yes, Jesus is present to us in the offerings of compassionate and

loving support from family and friends. Just as Jesus was there to catch the sinking Peter during the storm, Jesus is there to catch us, if we have the trust and faith, to seek Jesus' hand and reach for it.

L  
i  
k  
e

t  
h  
e

d  
i  
s  
c  
i  
p  
l  
e  
s

a  
n  
d

t  
h  
o  
s  
e

o  
f

J  
e