

## Swimming Lessons Nineteenth Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle A (Matt 14:22-23)

### I. Swimming Lessons in Faith, Love, and Trust

During these hot days of summer, one of our favorite recreations, and sports, is swimming. It's a great way to cool off, spend time as a family and friends, and just relax. It's great exercise too. And all across America on these summer days, you can stop in at any given pool, and if your patient enough, you will witness a ritual, a rite of passage, that has been with us since first pools! You will see mom and dad, or perhaps an older brother or sister, patiently trying to coax a little one into the pool for the first time.

I hope we've all had the opportunity to take part in this ritual. You stand there in waste deep water, arms outstretched, gazing intently on the child, big smile on your face, pleading over and over again, "Come on, it's all right, I won't let you go, I'm right here, I'll catch you" . . . and adding as many variations as you can think of, over and over again!

Meanwhile, the child stands frozen on the edge of the pool, unable to command their little arms and legs to move. They're terrified! Outside they are motionless – but their insides are tumbling! The child sees how much fun everyone else is having in the pool, they want to be having fun with mom, dad, and the family. But the water! It's scary! They've had that sensation of failing, of not being able to breath in water, of choking, and they want none of it. Faith, love, and trust set against fear. The stand-off could go on all day.

### II. Disciples on the Edge

Like the child on the edge of the pool, the disciples in today's Gospel are terrified. Who could blame them? Imagine being in a small boat, miles offshore, land nowhere in sight, and being swept up and tossed about by strong winds, and suddenly a human form appears on the horizon, walking on the water toward you. It could be part of a Stephen King novel!

But Jesus speaks to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." And so we have the same situation in the Gospel as we do by the side of the swimming pool:

God the Father, in Jesus, standing on the water, arms outstretched, reassuring his Twelve children, "It's me, I'm right here, don't be afraid."

### III. It Was Peter's Idea

Now perhaps we've always thought that the point of this Gospel is that if Peter only had faith, and if we had faith, we could do the impossible and walk right up to Jesus on the water. But that's impossible! We're not supposed to walk on water! Only God can do that. It seems Jesus is expecting the impossible of Peter and then chides at him for not having faith. This doesn't sound like the Jesus from five weeks ago that said, "Come to me . . . my yoke is easy, and my burden light." Expecting the impossible doesn't sound like a light burden!

But if we look at the Gospel again, we see that walking on water is PETER's idea! Peter knows Jesus, and, like the child at the pool, he knows he is loved, and that Jesus will not let any harm come to him. So he reasons he can let go of the side of the boat; Jesus will keep him safe. Like the child at the pool, faith, love, and trust overcomes fear, and Peter ventures out into the water.

What a moment for both parent and child, and Jesus and Peter! A miracle! Peter actually manages a few steps from the boat. But what happens? He thinks of the wind and of the waves, and not of Jesus' love, and, fearing the waves and the sea, he forgets who it is, the very Son of God, that is in the water with him. Terrified, Peter begins to sink, and, fearing the Lord might actually let him drown, cries out, "Lord, save me!"

Jesus stretches out his hand and catches Peter, just as Peter, when Peter was in the boat, knew Jesus would. And Jesus chides Peter for his lack of faith, just as a parent might say, "See, I told you I would catch you!"

### IV. Out of the Boat!

Now it wasn't Jesus' idea for Peter to do the impossible and walk on water, but Jesus ***DID*** command Peter to leave the boat. As Jesus' disciples, we too are commanded to leave our boat. Once a week we gather here at St. Katharine's in our boat. It can be a very stormy world at time, full of waves and wind, outside of this worship space. But here we are one body, we share the same purpose and ideals, here we gather as one in the love of Christ.

But, with the Father, Christ is out there in the storm, always at work in the world. And He calls to us, "Come!" And we must leave our safe boat, our once-a-week lifeboat, and follow him out onto the waves. And that can be terrifying. The Kingdom is not yet here in full; bad things still happen to good people out there on the water.

But miraculous, wonderful things happen out there on the water too! And like the child sitting by the side of the pool, we don't want to miss out on the fun and the joy. We think of the holiness, the joy, the love the saints who have gone before us, like St. Katharine Drexel, the way they have changed the world through love, and we think of the saints right here in our community, and how their love changes the lives of our neighbors here in Frederick, and we want to be a part of it.

Strengthened by the Eucharist, hand-in-hand with Christ, we eagerly jump over the side of our boat and head out into the waves. “This is the week,” we might say, “When:

- ✎ I’m finally going to pray every day
- ✎ I’m going to shower my spouse and family with my love and attention
- ✎ I’m going to read the bulletin and get involved with a ministry
- ✎ I’m finally going to reconcile with that pesky neighbor.”

We want to walk on the water, skip on the water, maybe even jet-ski on the water.

- ✎ But by Tuesday the waves are getting to us, and our knees start to get wet.
- ✎ By Thursday we have an argument at home, or a bad day at work, and we’re up to our belly buttons.
- ✎ By Friday, someone we love hurts us, or we hurt someone we love, and we’re right down in the water, panting and doing the dog paddle, desperate to get back here, where its safe, in our boat.

And that’s O.K.. Jesus knows that we will fail. He expects that. He also expects that we remember who He is, the Son of God, and that He will save us. Indeed, WE ARE SAVED. As we proclaim in our Eucharist, Christ has redeemed us from the sin and darkness of the world. We have nothing to fear. The same Christ who offered Himself on the cross for us is waiting out there on the water for us, with arms outstretched, ready to catch us.” “Be not afraid!”

#### V. “Be Not Afraid!”

May the Holy Spirit encourage us to think on these things, and pray over them, the next time we find ourselves at a pool, and look with prayerful eyes on the parent coaxing a child into the water.

Think of how we, as flawed as we are, would risk our own lives before letting harm come to a child in the water; and how much more Christ and the Father will do to save us.

Think too of the freedom and the joy of the child who overcomes fear with faith, love, and trust. How much more freedom and joy is available to us!