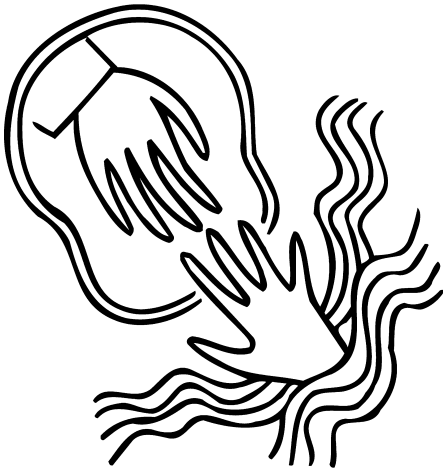


YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 8 AUGUST 7, 2011



The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the Fourteenth Chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon - August 7, 2011

Year A - The Year of Matthew - Pentecost 8

1 Kings 19:9-18 and Psalm 85:8-13); Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful place. In Biblical language, it makes northern Israel the land of milk and honey. It also is central in the

narrative of Jesus' ministry. The Sea of Galilee is great freshwater lake or inland sea 13 miles long and 7 miles wide. In Jesus' time, it supported a sizeable population and a significant commercial fishing industry. Josephus, the ancient historian, wrote that the Seas of Galilee was "wonderful in its characteristics and in its beauty. Thanks to the rich soil there is not a plant that does not flourish there, and the inhabitants grow everything: the air is so temperate that it suits the most diverse species."

Sometimes it is easy to be confused because the Sea of Galilee goes by different names. Some texts refer to it as a lake, which of course it is. Others call it by the alternative names of Tiberias or Gennesaret. However, the names all refer to the same place. Of course, The Sea of Galilee should not be confused with the Dead Sea. That is another place entirely. The Dead Sea is far to the south and is a dead lifeless place while The Sea of Galilee is very much alive with varieties of fish and many fishing villages.

Our Lord's disciples were, for the most part, men who made their livelihood from the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is often found near its shores, first calling his disciples and later teaching the people along Sea's surrounding hills and plains. The Sea of Galilee was so much a part of Jesus' life and ministry that at one point he even began preaching from a boat anchored just offshore while the people gathered on the beach.

Consequently, it is no surprise to find the Sea of Galilee figuring prominently again in today's gospel narrative. Jesus sends his disciples off in a boat "to the other side." In fact, if you read the text carefully, Jesus made them leave while he goes off to spend some time by himself on a mountain in prayer. As the early hours of the morning approach, the disciples have not reached the other side of the Sea. A storm has blown in, and the disciples' boat is being "battered by the waves."

This is not a surprise. The peaceful calm of the Sea of Galilee can quickly become transformed by storms big and small. Winds funnel through the Galilee hill country and stir up the waters quickly. More violent are the winds that come off the hills of the Golan Heights to the east. Trapped in the basin, the winds can be deadly to fishermen. A storm in March 1992 sent waves 10 feet high crashing into downtown Tiberias.

The disciples are caught in the waves of a storm. Then, Jesus – seemingly out of nowhere – comes “walking toward them on the Sea.” The disciples are terrified and cry out “in fear.”

Of course they were afraid, who would not be? There is the wind. Then, are the waves; and now there is what they think is a ghost. However, Jesus says to them, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter then speaks. Notice, there is a little echo of doubt in his voice. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus replies, "Come." Then, Peter hesitantly starts making his way across the waves. However, fear overcomes him, and in his fright, he begins to sink. "Lord, save me!" he calls out. Then, Jesus promptly saves him pulling the sinking Peter up from the water.

What to make of it all? What is calm can quickly become a storm. It is true of the Sea of Galilee. It is also true of each one of us.

A very practical person might be tempted to think that what he disciples needed was just a bigger boat. Perhaps they needed one more suited to withstand the storm and the wind. Technology – human ingenuity or our own self-assurance that is the answer. However, remember that even the Titanic sank.

We think we humans can rise above our nature with just the right control. However, no human is unsinkable when it comes to our sins and shortcomings. For us, every storm is the perfect storm if we are paralyzed by fear, worry, sin, anger, or self-importance. This gospel narrative has fundamental implications about the human condition. All of us are suspended precariously between unknown and fearsome depths, and the desire to be the masters of the wind, waves, and world around us.

However, weathering the storm ironically demands that we first come to recognize and accept our lack of control, and our shortcomings, sins, or vulnerabilities. There are, after all, few perfect boats or, to put it another way, there are no perfect people. In spite of our occasional bluster, when the storm hits and the winds blow, most of us still call out for the Lord. Only in giving up our own certainty and our very selves do we

find our true hope— and our salvation.

In our baptism, the Old Adam, the old sinful self is drowned. In the waters of baptism our sinful self dies and is raised to new life in Christ. The gift of faith given to us in baptism does not by any means guarantee a lifetime of smooth sailing ahead. However, like Peter in our gospel account today, Jesus, through baptism holds out his hand to us to pull us out of our fear of death, and our drowning in sin and selfishness.

The Sea of Galilee is, to this day, subject to squalls and storms. Like Peter and the disciples, we still find ourselves caught and calling out to the Lord. Only Christ overcomes sin, faithlessness, and dread of the waters deep beneath and within us. Jesus does all this, as he did with Peter, by reaching out his hand in rescue. "Take heart, it is I," he says to us. Our sinful lives are saved by faith in Christ who saves us through his death and resurrection given to us through the waters of Holy Baptism. Then, from our own rickety craft, we proclaim, as did the disciples centuries ago, "Truly you are the Son of God." Amen.