

*22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

If Cory had not been injured he never would have asked the question. It was just a twisted ankle that Cory suffered but it got Mike to wondering. For Mike had heard the prayers that the campers would be safe this week. Mike had prayed that prayer himself, repeatedly. Then Cory twisted his ankle in a game of ultimate Frisbee. I have a question for you pastors, Mike told we three pastors sitting at the meal table with him. "How do you understand the fact that we prayed for the safety of the campers and Corey is injured?"

My first reaction was surprise that Mike had not figured out the answer to that question by this time in his life. He was at camp this week because his daughter had been born with Spina Bifida, an opening at the bottom of her spine from which the fluid leaked. She had been through a number of surgeries and was able to do most things except she could not void her bladder. Four times a day she needed to be catheterized – Mike was at camp all week to do just that. Surely Mike had prayed for her – for her healing. That healing had not been miraculously given.

My second reaction was to think, "Good question, Mike."

We have before us today the account of Jesus walking on the water – a sign the disciples showed that they understood when they confessed, "Truly you are the Son of God." Now that was not their initial reaction – when they saw Jesus walking on the sea they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost." But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered, “Lord, if it is you command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus said, “Come.” Notice it was not Jesus’ idea that Peter should step out of the boat but Jesus did go along with what Peter wanted.

Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. For a moment he was doing what cannot be done. But then he noticed the strong wind and became frightened and began to sink. And he cried out, “Lord save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

I do not think I need to preach the sermon that is in that incident to you – my guess is you know that sermon already. When we have faith and do not doubt we can do some very surprising things. But Jesus did not stay out on the water with Peter – helping him practice having more faith – Jesus and Peter got into the boat and the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

You can see why Mike asked his question. He knows this story and others like it. He knows Jesus is God and can do anything. We prayed the campers would be safe – but Cory twisted his ankle and another camper got sick and had to go home. Was there something lacking in our prayer? Or is there something lacking in Jesus’ power?

Many of you know this question first hand. You prayed, in some cases I prayed with you and for you, and the very thing for which you prayed was not granted. Week after week we pray for people with cancer and heart trouble and family troubles and sometimes we come back to tell of life restored, relationships healed. Sometimes we come with heavy hearts and sorrow.

This whole walking on the water event happened because Jesus wanted time to pray. After the feeding of the 5000 Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side. After he dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. Ever since he had heard about the death of John the Baptist Jesus had been trying to get time alone to pray. Was his prayer of prayer of why? Why did John have to die? Why can’t you show your power, Father? Why won’t you destroy evil and give victory to good? We cannot know what Jesus prayed but we know he did. And I believe that in time his praying led him to the cross.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus was sinking down in the waters of death and had cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” and after Jesus had breathed his last, a soldier standing there said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” The same confession that the disciples made seeing Jesus triumphant walking on water this soldier made having witnessed Jesus alone, mocked, crying out, dying.

The church of Jesus Christ could have picked either moment as the moment that most reveals God. Walking on water could be the mark of the church – Paul could have written of this moment in his letters though he never did. There on the wall we could have a depiction of Jesus triumphant above the waves. But if we did every Corey and every girl with Spina Bifida would seem an outsider.

But the Holy Spirit has led the church to put the cross in the center – teaching that God is most clearly revealed in Jesus’ dying for us – for Corey, for Mike’s daughter, and for every suffering and dying one. For when Jesus sunk down into the waters of death the Father reached out a hand to pull him up into life. He will do the same for you. Again and again and again until that final time when catheters and crutches shall be no more and we shall all be worshipping the Son of God.

Until that day we will pray, seeking the Father’s will for our lives, asking for what we need, especially for faith and hope and love. Amen.