

Can you swim? It is surprising to find that some people are really good swimmers, and some people can't swim at all. My dad worked his way through high school, college and some of his seminary years each summer as a lifeguard. My mom faithfully took us to swimming lessons, even sat in the bleachers while my siblings and me cycled through lessons at Nathan Hale high school. So it was a surprise to me that my mom rarely went beyond her calves in the water. She loved the beach and loved to see us swim, but I don't know that my mom can swim all that well. The few times she went on a boat, that life jacket was strapped tight and she was nervous about falling in at any depth. Out on the water with Jesus and his disciples we learn that faced with fear in any and every situation we, his followers, can **"Take Courage in Christ."**

Take Courage in Christ.

1) In who he is.

2) In what he does.

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus had wanted to withdraw by boat to a solitary place earlier that day, but this huge crowd had followed by foot and found him. He taught them till evening. Then Jesus performed a great miracle - feeding 5000 men, + women and children miraculously with five loaves and two fish. The disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of leftovers – a clear miracle. Fed miraculously, the crowd wanted to make Jesus king by force. So Jesus got the disciples into the boat and sent them off.

Jesus personally dismissed the crowd, then went up on a mountainside to pray by himself. Jesus had to be so busy, but he took time to pray and talk to his Father in heaven. What a privilege prayer is to us!

It was now very late, and *"Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake."* I am a heavy man, and I know I sink quickly. Even light men sink quickly. This is a miracle. It really happened. All the disciples saw it.

The disciples do what people often resort to when they can't explain something. They jump to superstition, or the fates, or karma to explain things. Terrified, they said, *"It's a ghost."* They saw something they couldn't explain, and were terrified. This often happens. While initially there may be excitement or amazement, it often quickly turns to fear. How are they doing that? And by what power? I must be in trouble. They know something I don't know. They have some power I don't. Maybe they know my sin, my weakness. We feel helpless and afraid. They certainly did.

Immediately Jesus speaks to them who were terrified and crying out in their terror. Jesus said to them, *"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."* Listen to these words. *"Take courage!"* (When Jesus gives a command, he also gives the strength and power to do so.) Take for instance the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter said, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31). A person, dead in sin by nature, enemy of God, has no natural power to believe, nor decide for Christ. We are enemies. But the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel communicated through Word and Sacrament to accomplish what God has sent it to do. God's Word has power. *"Take Courage."* When God tells you to take courage, he gives the power. It's not like a battle scene in a war movie where someone tells another to take courage with no idea on whether they'll make it or win or not, relying only on their own power or plan. When God tells you it's different – he stands behind it. He told Joshua, *"Be strong and Courageous"* (Joshua 1:9). He could take courage because the LORD told him to. In love God explained – *"For the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."* Jesus said enough with *"Take Courage."* In love he adds, *"It is I."*

"It is I." The words can be translated simply, *"I am."* Some Jews, Jesus' own countrymen, once accused Jesus of being demon possessed. They refused to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the true God in the flesh. Jesus said to them, *"Very truly I tell you, Before Abraham was born, I am"* (John 8:58), claiming clearly he is true God. It's the same words, *"I am."* We can translate them here *"It is I."* The Jews raised up stones to stone Jesus that day, but the disciples

here saw the evidence before them as Jesus walked on the water and by faith confessed that he truly is the Son of God. We can **Take Courage** in any and every situation because Jesus tells us to and because of **who he is** – our God in the flesh – for us.

“Don’t be afraid,” Jesus said. He says those words so many times to his disciples. God said it so many times to his people. Why are we always so afraid? It’s because we’re sinful. We doubt. We struggle. We hide things. We try to put on a good front, even lie when we’re red handed in our guilt, or falling apart because of the fallout of someone else’s sins. But when something happens beyond our expectation or explanation and we sense a greater power, our fear becomes plain. Jesus tells us that because of his command and because of who he is, we need not fear. It’s Jesus.

The disciples would spend the rest of their lives and ministries learning the depth of what Jesus says. God helped them understand more and more as they saw what Jesus does. The world and their sinful flesh did not want to loosen their hold on the disciples. The disciples would fear many more times – fleeing in the garden of gethsemane, locking themselves in that room after Jesus was crucified on the cross. A lot of the resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in the Bible show Jesus spending time bringing the disciples from terror to trust, from crushing fear to courage in him and who he is, in what he did and does for them now and eternally.

Jesus, the true Son of God, laid down his life for them, sinners. Jesus laid down his life for all people to save all people. He paid the debt of our sin, our failures, our lies, our guilt, and shame. It’s paid. It’s done. The skeletons are cleaned out by God’s forgiveness. Our records are blotted out by his blood. We or others may not forget, but God says *“I will remember their sins no more”* (Hebrews 8:12). He chooses not to. Maybe we should too. Forgiveness from God does that. Now we live for him, trusting in Him.

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, *“tell me to come to you on the water.”* *“Come,”* he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, *“Lord, save me!”* Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. *“You of little faith,”* he said, *“why did you doubt?”* Our swim coach was very energetic and made swimming lessons fun. He would show us the swim stroke and then maybe use one of the swimmers who could do the strokes well as an example. Peter was an example of taking courage. In faith he trusts Jesus’ promise, does not presume to order Jesus around in what he was doing, but says, *“If it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”* *“Come,”* he said. Wasn’t this the greater miracle?!? Jesus, true Son of God, walked on water. Miracle. But now Peter walks on water by the power of Jesus’ command! Amazing! But then *he sees the wind*. You know the weather is bad when you *see the wind*. People see the wind in a tornado. People see the wind carry away their hat and take it forty feet in the air. People see the wind as it throws the water of the sea and causes waves to rise and crash drowning even the strongest.

Can you swim? Can you swim well enough to withstand the winds and the crashing waves of this life. When we struggle to understand God’s plan for us or a loved one, a season ending break or sprain, a cancer diagnosis, the death of a loved one – a parent, a spouse, a child. This is all too much for us. The ability to forgive someone when they have sinned against us – not saying what they did was ok, but letting go of your wrath against them, how can we? Can you swim well enough? We may think, sitting in the safety of these pews that we are. But on our own we fail. Peter learned this fast as physical wind and waves threatened to take his life. He took his eyes off of Jesus, and in place of courage, there was only fear.

“Beginning to sink,” Peter cried out, *“Lord, save me!”* Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. *“You of little faith,”* he said, *“why did you doubt?”* Jesus caught him, wind and waves still tossing everything about, but not Jesus, and not Peter anymore when Jesus caught him. Jesus could say that to us many times in my life – *“why did you doubt?”* We doubted. We were afraid. We sank in fear or sin. But Jesus caught us with his forgiveness and love. He restores our courage. *“When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.”* The Lord doesn’t always stop the storm. He saves us in the midst of it and gives us courage as we face the struggles and fears that face us. **Take Courage in what he does for you** – catching you in the midst of each storm. You are safe in him.

They *worshipped him*. We do too for **who he is** and **what he does**. Worship him and *“Take Courage,”* in the face of temptations that want us to turn from Jesus, slide into sin, or lie and stay in our sin rather than change because we’re afraid of all the what if’s. He will help you follow the right path He walked on water! It’s him. He shows you! *Take courage* in the face of seemingly uncertain things like a new school, a new job, a new retirement, a new phase of life, like Peter stepping out of the boat. *Take courage* in the face of sickness, trouble, crosses, and even death -other’s or our own, like when you can see the wind that could harm. In Jesus’ command, receive the power his promises give. **Take Courage**. You are safe in him – **who he is**, your Savior God. Always keep your eyes on him and **Take Courage for what he does** – catching you with his love and forgiveness, saving you now and eternally. **“Take Courage in Christ.” In who he is. In what he does.** Amen.