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In Mathew's Gospel lesson today, we have the familiar story of Jesus walking on the water and just before this, Mathew told the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 which we heard last week.

A big miracle last week, and another one this morning. So let's look at how this one happened. After the big miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus decided to go up to the mountain and pray by himself so he dismissed the disciples. He told them to get into their boat and row to the other side of the lake. Now the Sea of Galilee really is lake—a big lake. I checked and it's thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, so it's big, not huge, but big. So the disciples headed across the sea in a small boat when all at once a storm whipped up the winds. The disciples rowed as hard as they could, but the wind was against them and they were not making a lot of progress. But these men were experienced fisherman and they were strong and tough, so they just kept at it. I'll bet they were frustrated, but the story doesn't say they were afraid—not yet.

Finally, in those dark hours just before dawn, the disciples saw Jesus walking toward them on the water and then they were afraid. It wasn't the storm that scared them, it was Jesus. They thought they were seeing a ghost. How else could they explain a man walking on water?

But then they heard Jesus' voice over the sound of the storm: "Take heart! It is I. Do not be afraid." So Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

'If it is you' isn't exactly an affirmation of faith. But you'll notice that Peter is the only one of the disciples that got out of the boat, so he did have more faith than the rest of them. So Peter says, "If it is you..." and Jesus replied, "Come." So Peter stepped out of the boat and onto the water. Remember, he was in the middle of the sea and a storm was raging all around him.

He did okay until he noticed the storm. Then he became frightened and began to sink. But he had made it almost to Jesus when he lost it. And he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reached out and caught him and when he had him, he said, "You of little faith! Why did you doubt?"

When Mathew wrote this Gospel, Christians were being persecuted. Peter had been crucified and many other Christians were being killed because of their faith. Those early Christians had stepped out in faith to join the Church just as Peter had stepped out of that boat in faith. Now they were scared. They wondered where God was. Did he care about them?

This story spoke to them of assurance in the face of fear. It spoke to them of salvation in the face of disaster. It said to them that Jesus was with them even in the midst of a raging storm.

So what does this old story about Jesus and a frightened disciple have to do with us today? The answer is that we too are often afraid. And just like Peter, the things we fear are often real.

In Peter's case, he's afraid of the storm. He was an experienced fisherman. He probably knew of men who had lost their lives in storms on that sea. His fear was not unreasonable. Even today, we hear tragic stories of men and women lost at sea while fishing. It is a dangerous profession. So Peter was afraid. He feared for his life so he called out to Jesus. "Lord, save me!" he cried. The early Church was afraid, too. They too were crying out, "Lord, save us!"

And we're afraid, too. We're afraid of lots of things. We're afraid of illness and death, we're afraid of war and terrorism, we're afraid of the economy and crime, and so many other things. So we too cry out to God, "Lord, save us!"

I don't know about you, but I have a little anxiety about what I have and have not done. I'm afraid I have not done enough. Jesus makes it quite clear that we're supposed to feed the hungry, we're supposed to welcome the stranger and clothe the naked, and we're supposed to visit the sick and those in prison. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are a member of my family, you did it to me."

Like all of you, I have helped some people, but I failed to help others. Like you, I sometimes stopped and offered my help but sometimes I just walked on by.

So what should we say when we meet Jesus? It would be kind of silly to say, "I did my best" because Jesus knows better. It would be foolish to list all the good stuff we've done because Jesus knows—and he also knows what we've done wrong. We can only cry, "Lord, have mercy. Lord, save us!" And when we do cry "Lord, save us!" just as he did with Peter, Jesus will say, "Come." And we will feel those strong, loving arms of Jesus reaching out and lifting us up. He will pull us to him and he will say, "Oh, you of little faith! Why did you doubt?" And then he will save us.

That is the Word of God.