

Lesson 14

Proper 14

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:22–33

This Holy Gospel follows the feeding of the five thousand. As evening had approached, the disciples had suggested that Jesus send the crowd away so they could buy food for themselves. Jesus, however, had multiplied loaves and fish and had provided an abundant supper for everyone there on the grassy hillside. Then, after that display of compassion and power, He had sent His disciples ahead in the boat while He stayed and dismissed the crowd.

204. What was Jesus looking forward to for Himself at this time?

205. What does being alone with God in the Word and in prayer add to your life as a Christian?

The disciples met with a storm as they sailed across the lake and evidently made little headway against the storm, for it was the fourth watch—3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.—when Jesus went to them, walking on the lake.

206. What was the disciples' reaction at seeing Jesus coming toward them? How did Jesus calm their fears and reassure them?

The Greek has *egō eimi*, "It is I." It is the same emphatic phrase used by Jesus in His great "I am" statements. In the Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek, these words were used for the name *Yahweh*, by which God revealed Himself as Israel's covenant Lord.

Impetuous Peter, brimming with excitement and faith at seeing what his Lord could do, wanted the experience for himself.

207. Was Peter being presumptuous in his request? How is it that he was able to walk on the water to Jesus? Why did Peter sink into the water when his faith began to fail?

There is no indication that Peter ever walked on water again—or even tried to. The miracle had served its purpose in Jesus' plan for Peter and the others.

208. Why did some see Jesus' miracles and believe He was the Son of God, while others rejected Jesus in spite of His miracles? (See John 9:35–41.) Someone has said, "Trusting the word of Jesus sometimes means we have to get out of the boat and onto the water." What is meant by this? How have you experienced this in your Christian life?

The Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:4–18

Luther praised the Book of Job "magnificent and sublime." It was written by an unknown Israelite poet-philosopher and is generally dated anywhere from the time of Solomon to the time of the exile and later, which is suggested by its "wisdom literature" and "apocalyptic" style. Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, points out that the unusual nature of the Hebrew, both in terms of the words and the meaning given to them, as well as the syntax, may suggest an origin in more ancient, even patriarchal, times.

The writing explores the meaning of faith when confronted with the mystery of the suffering of the righteous. In the book, the consideration is prompted by Satan's being given permission by God to test righteous Job. In effect, it is also to test and possibly discredit the Lord Himself for building His relationship with man on faith and faithfulness. Because of this, the experience of Job and the analyses that follow give the book a cosmic significance.

What occasions the search for understanding is righteous Job's being tested by losing everything but his life itself, which God declares to be off-limits for Satan. Three friends come to comfort Job, but they end up offering only the logical explanation: Job was guilty of some serious sin that had brought God's severe judgment on him. They urge him to confess this and repent. But Job steadfastly maintains his innocence and his commitment to trust the Lord "though He slay me" (13:15). A fourth friend rebukes Job for his hasty, defensive talk and points to the value in divine chastening and God's redemptive purpose in it. Then God Himself speaks to Job, declaring His preeminence and His unsearchable wisdom. Job is led to repent of his questioning and arguing and to submit to God's mysterious will, admitting, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). And in the end, Job, who had lost everything, is blessed by God more abundantly than ever.

Job's fourth friend, Elihu, listened as Job and his three older friends sought the reason for Job's suffering. Then he spoke, and in conclusion, said, "Out of the north [from Mount Hermon, the source of storms] comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty" (37:22), thus preparing Job to hear the Lord speak to him out of the storm he was experiencing. Today's lesson is the first part of four chapters in which the Lord speaks to Job; it begins with "The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind" (38:1). Right from the outset, the Lord makes it clear that Job's complaining and blaming Him were unjustified because Job's words were spoken without knowledge and understanding.

209. How did the Lord's series of rhetorical questions (which continue through chapter 41) underscore for Job his lack of knowledge?

210. Though the Lord's questions did not deal with Job's suffering nor with his complaints, what did they accomplish in Job? (See 40:3–5; 42:1–6.)

211. What can we learn from Job’s experience and the Lord’s words to him? (See Romans 8:28, 31–39; 11:33–36.)

212. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 10:5–17

Paul was writing to Jewish Christians to explain how faith in Christ “fits” with Jews and how Jews “fit” with faith in Christ. Naturally, he quoted Old Testament Scripture to them. He began with Leviticus to show what the Law required doing. Then in Deuteronomy, he showed how Israel’s hopes and its faith in the promised Messiah were to be at the center of their doing the ceremonial laws. Then he ended with Deuteronomy’s assurance that this prophetic Word was not something strange and foreign, but was near them—in their mouths and hearts. He then used that Old Testament base to move to the word of faith that he was proclaiming.

In this lesson, the apostle Paul is urging his readers to remember that the convictions produced by the “word of faith” are to be expressed. The Word is to be in our mouths as well as in our hearts. The Christian faith is, of course, deeply personal, but it is not private. Jesus calls people to salvation and immediately makes them His representatives to one another and to the world. The Bible knows of no silent Christians who will not identify themselves publicly as part of the Church through their confession of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Paul wanted his Jewish readers—and us—to be bold in confessing Jesus Christ!

“Jesus is Lord.” This first creed was just two words in Greek: *Kurios Iesous*. *Kurios* was the Greek word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, for *Yahweh*. By saying *Kurios Iesous*, the first Christians were confessing Jesus to be the covenant Lord, *Yahweh* Himself, who had come to fulfill His covenant.

213. Why did Paul focus his “if you . . . believe in your heart” on “that God raised [Jesus] from the dead”?

214. If it is the heart’s faith in Jesus that *justifies*, making the believer right with God through faith in Jesus, why is it the mouth’s confession that *saves*? (See Matthew 10:32–33; Luke 9:26.) Why is there an inseparable connection between heart and mouth in this matter of Christian faith and discipleship?

215. What part does our membership and participation in the Church’s fellowship play in all of this? How do Paul’s quotations from Isaiah and Joel relate to this consideration?

The quotation from Joel is especially significant because Joel’s Hebrew said, “Everyone who calls on the name of *Yahweh* will be saved.” Paul, quoting from the Septuagint, wrote, “the name of *Kurios*”—but from his previous statements, you know he was referring to Jesus, pointing to Jesus as *Yahweh* acting to fulfill the covenant of salvation.

216. What comfort is there for us in Paul's saying "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him"?

217. What challenge is there for the Church and for us as individual Christians in being part of the process? What is at the heart of the process by which the Church leads people to a faith that confesses Jesus Christ to be Savior and Lord?

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Almighty and most merciful God, preserve us from all harm and danger that we, being ready in both body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish what You want done; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:22–33

204. Having dismissed both His disciples and the crowd, Jesus was looking forward to some quiet time, being alone with His Father in prayer.

205. Give opportunity for participants to tell what personal, private devotional life means to them. Being alone with God really emphasizes one's own personal relationship with Him. In that setting, you are reading the Word and talking to Him in prayer not because you are part of a group that is doing that, but only because you want to communicate with your heavenly Father. We really find out what God means to us when we are alone with Him.

206. As Jesus approached them on the water, the disciples thought He was an apparition, a ghost, and they were terrified. They, of course, never expected Jesus to come to them in this miraculous way. Jesus calmed their fears by speaking to them reassuringly: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Help your group understand that *egō eimi* is the covenant name in the Greek Scriptures with which the disciples were familiar. *Eimi* by itself means "I am." When the pronoun *egō* is added, it gains emphasis, like "I, I only, am." Note the reaction evoked by another of Jesus' "I ams." (See John 8:48–59.)

207. That Jesus accepted and approved Peter's request indicates He did not consider Peter presumptuous but encouraged and supported his excited faith. Peter was able to walk on water by virtue of Jesus' divine power and Peter's faith that Jesus would grant him that experience. When Peter saw the wind and waves, he began to focus again on the problem instead of on Jesus' power over the problem.

208. Peter and the others did not need continuing power to walk on water physically during their ministries as apostles. The incident had served its purpose. The miracle was another confirmation of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Jesus did not perform His miracles for flashy display, nor would He perform on demand to satisfy skeptics. He knew that even the miraculous will not overcome the persistent disbelief of the unbeliever. But for His disciples, the miracles of Jesus were His "credentials" as the Son of God. (See John 14:8–14.) "Getting out of the boat" means acting in faith and trust without insisting that outward circumstances themselves become ideal and thus substantiate the presence and promise of Christ. It is acting on the *promise* of His presence and power. Some in your group may share a personal experience of this, especially if you are ready to do so too. Martin Franzmann says in *Follow Me*: "Faith is not fancy and sentiment; faith is relatedness to the divine person and the divine act. Faith means personal involvement, assent, submission, and obedience. When the Christ says, 'Come,' the disciple comes to Him, committed to His will, without regard for all normal probabilities" (p. 143).

The Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:4–18

Whether Job was a historical figure, whose actual experience is described, as tradition has generally assumed, or whether the book is a kind of parable offering a philosophical expansion on a “legend” about Job, as modern critical scholars suggest, has been argued without either side convincing the other. No other Scripture really bears on the matter. Horace Hummel, in *The Word Becoming Flesh*, says,

The dialogues are couched in such a highly artistic and poetic form that it is hard to view them as any kind of exact transcription of actual conversations. Hence, we probably must assume a fair amount of creative literary development of the original exchanges by the author in order to better elucidate their theological significance. Such a concession need militate against neither the basic historicity of the book’s report, nor against the special inspiration of the book as we have it. (pp. 458–59)

209. The rhetorical questions dramatically emphasize the wondrous power and will of the Lord in His creation of all things. They ask Job if he has done things that are patently impossible for man and are possible only for the Creator Himself.

210. The Lord did not deal directly with Job’s complaints but led him to look beyond the obvious—to stand in awe before the Lord, recognizing the folly of his mistrust and bowing in humble repentance.

211. We learn from Job to let God be God and not expect Him to do things the way we think they should be done. We need to trust His wisdom—and even more than that, to trust His love for us, which He proved in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. A heavenly Father who loves us that much will not play fast and loose with us. We can trust Him even when we don’t understand the whys or the hows of life.

212. God’s speaking from the storm in Job relates directly to the saving action of Jesus in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The rhetorical questions also strikingly relate to the disciples’ awe-prompted “Who is this?”

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 10:5–17

213. The resurrection of Jesus is the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith. Christ’s resurrection from death, to die no more, is the bedrock upon which our hopes are based.

214. Faith in Christ’s atoning work, and faith alone, justifies. (See Romans 3:28.) *Salvation*, however, with its root meaning of “healing,” suggests an ongoing relationship with the Lord, a life under the influence of the Holy Spirit that includes openly confessing His name and proclaiming the Gospel truth as the Spirit gives us opportunity. (See 1 Corinthians 1:4–9.) Our mouths must testify to what is in our hearts because we are commissioned to be Christ’s representatives in the world.

215. Our congregational membership and participation in the larger Church’s confession and fellowship identify us publicly as Christians. The fellowship we enjoy with other Christians then becomes the workshop of the Holy Spirit in which we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus. (See Colossians 3:12–17.) One of the problems of the “electronic church” is that it fosters a privatism in which Christians attach outwardly only to people on TV screens. Isaiah brings the assurance that God is completely worthy of our faith and trust. Joel’s statement emphasizes “calling on the name of the Lord”—a phrase used consistently in the Old Testament with reference to public worship. Again we see that Paul stresses the Good News that Jesus is this Lord.

216. There is great comfort for us in seeing that ethnicity does not determine God’s acceptance. We Gentiles are God’s chosen people only by adoption, but that adoption is through His Son, Jesus Christ. (See Galatians 3:26–29.)

217. These words challenge the Church to be as inclusive as the Gospel is. There is a reality about life in society and in churches that a congregation made up of a certain kind of people will attract people who are similar to them. The inclusiveness of the Gospel, however, urges the Church to reach out to all and to rule out any *deliberate* exclusiveness in its approach. Some congregations are finding it effective to meet ethnic and language needs by providing ministries that meet the specific needs of distinct groups while still under the umbrella of and in fellowship with the larger congregation. For us as individual Christians, the challenge is to

overcome prejudicial feelings in which we feel that some are more suitable for hearing the Gospel of Jesus and living in the Church with us than others are. Paul's "How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" challenges us to be serious about the mission tasks our Lord gives us, both personally and through those whose ministries we support. At the heart of the process is a recognition by the Church and individual Christians that just as the Holy Spirit works faith in their hearts and leads them to confess "Jesus is Lord," so, too, does the same Spirit motivate and enable them to confess Jesus' saving name to those who do not yet know Him by faith.