Where is Jesus when we need him? They had been up all night fighting for their lives. Rather than a soft bed, the darkness brought work - hard work with sweat dripping down their faces. It should not have been this hard. They had crossed this lake many times. They had experienced fishermen with them who knew these waters well. But the wind was against them. And although they strained hard at the oars, they made little headway hour after hour. Where is Jesus when you need him?

When do you struggled with that question? In the darkness of the night? Or when the words of others have blown hard against you? Or when life and its troubles batter you? When friends fail you? When have you struggled, asking: Where is Jesus?

In his Word today, he answers you just as he answered his disciples: Take courage! I'm here. I'm with you. Keep believing his promise, my friends. Hold on to his words in faith. Take courage! I'm here, he says to you. Take him at his Word. That is faith. Faith's courage overcomes our fears and faith's courage dares whatever our Lord commands. That is the courage of the faith that holds on to Jesus' promise: Take courage! I'm here.

It had been a long day. Jesus had taken his disciples to a remote place but the crowds had followed. So Jesus spent the day teaching and healing the sick. As evening came, the disciples wanted to send the crowds away. But where could they buy food? Would they be able to make it to the surrounding towns?

So Jesus told his disciples that they should feed the crowds. We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish, they answered. And you know how Jesus showed them that no matter what the need, he can satisfy it, even if it is feeding 5,000 men plus women and children with only five loaves and two fish.

After supper he sent his disciples away in the boat. He dismissed the crowds and went up into the mountain to pray by himself. Think about that. Jesus, the almighty Son of God, turned to his heavenly Father in prayer. Jesus is also the Son of Man who humbled himself to our low condition. Although without sin, yet he experienced our struggles and temptations. As our brother he can surely sympathize with us in our weakness. He knows our needs from his own experience and he knows from experience what it means to bring those needs to the heavenly Father in prayer.

How often aren't our fears interlocked with our needs. We fear that our needs will not be met, whether that is the need to be feed or be rescued, the need to belong or to be loved, the need to be forgiven and reconciled to God, or whatever other need. We fear our needs will not be met.

But Jesus knows your needs. He knows your needs when he says: Take courage! I'm here. He knows how bad it is. He knows your greatest need and everything underneath. But he still says to you: Take courage! I'm here. No need is too great for him. And no matter how many needs there are, they are never too many for him. Take him at his Word. Faith's courage overcomes our fear, for faith knows and believes that Jesus satisfies all our needs from the least to the greatest.

As the night grew long into the 4th watch (between 3 and 6 in the morning), Jesus knew how the disciples had been struggling against the wind and waves and now they were ready for his help. Notice how Jesus’ timing may not fit our schedule. He let the disciples struggle for
most of the night. Jesus does not always satisfy our needs and take away our fears as soon as we think he should. But that is not because he is not here with us, or is not able to, or does not want to. Rather, he knows how slow we are to learn. But when the time is right, he will act.

Look at how he helped his disciples. He walked out onto the stormy sea and came towards the boat. The disciples mistook him for a ghost, but he called out to them right away: **Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.** His words took away their fear.

You see, that’s the courage of faith that overcomes our fears. It is the faith that takes Jesus at his Word and draws courage from his promises. And look! He walks on the water. Not even the forces of nature can hinder him. He is our God, as the disciples confessed when they worshiped him. He has the power over whatever you fear. He promises that he is with you. So faith holds him to his promise. Faith takes courage from his Word. And so faith’s courage overcomes our fears by relying on Jesus’ words: **Take courage! I’m here.**

And look at what Jesus’ words did for Peter. They gave his faith not only the courage to overcome his fear but also the courage to dare whatever his Lord commanded.

**Lord, if it is you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.** Those are words of faith, not doubt. It is not as if Peter had said: **If it’s really you - and I’m not 100% sure, but it might be - then prove it by telling me to come.** No, that is not what Peter said. It is more like when a mom says to her young child: **If you love me, give me a hug.** She is not questioning or doubting the child’s love, but rather inviting a demonstration of that love. So also Peter’s faith was looking for a way to express self. **If it is you, I - and I know it is, otherwise I would not be asking - tell me to come.**

But notice how Peter’s faith would not act without the Word of Jesus to cling to. Faith is not blind. Faith requires a word of promise to hold on to. Faith does not leap into the unknown, but rather does what our Lord tells us. Then it is no longer the unknown, for our Lord knows it. Don’t be misled by a so-called faith that has no promise or command from Jesus. Some people claim to dare great things for Jesus, but what they are daring has nothing to do with what Jesus has said. That is not faith but superstition.

But look at what great things faith does dare when it clings to the promise and command of our Lord. In that one word, **Come,** Jesus not only gave a command but also his promise to Peter that he would walk on the water to Jesus.

In faith Peter stepped out of the boat and began walking toward Jesus trusting his Word. Faith dares the impossible when Jesus has promised it.

But when he saw how strongly the wind blew, he doubted. Now let’s not fault Peter for seeing the wind and the waves. The man was not blind. We could hardly expect that he would not at least have been aware of them. The problem was that he overestimated their power - while at the same time severely underestimating the power of Jesus. For a moment, he thought that wind and those waves could actually stop him from walking on water. He feared that they might actually overrule his Lord who had commanded him to come. So he doubted.

You see, when our eyes leave Jesus to look at the troubles blowing around us, when our ears no longer pay attention to his words but listen to what others are saying, then doubts push faith aside. We begin to sink. Faith focuses on Jesus. Faith fills our hearts with his words. Faith does not have a double focus. That is what doubt is: wavering between two different opinions. Faith rather confesses: **What Jesus says is the truth. I will follow his Word no matter what distractions. I will dare whatever he commands.**

Now, don’t go and try walking on Madison Lake this afternoon. That is not a word of promise or a command Jesus has spoken to you. He only spoke it to Peter for that one occasion. To pretend that it is meant for you now is not faith but foolishness. And it ignores what Jesus has actually called on you to do in faith.
What is that? What has our Lord commanded us, his blood-bought people? We are to follow him and **be salt and light. Let our lights shine** so that others glorify our Father in heaven. How do we do that? By living Christian lives in kindness and love, forgiving one another just in Christ God has forgiven you. By being ready to give the reason for the hope that we have.

And by serving in the different roles in life our God has given us. Are you husband? Love your wife even when that means giving up what is dear to you. Place her before yourself. And bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Are you a wife? Submit to your husband as the Church submits to Christ, even if he does not always act Christ-like. Are you child? Obey your parents and honor them even when they do not seem fair. Are you a worker whether at home or in the workplace or at school? Do your work diligently for God’s glory whether others are watching or not. We could go on. Study the Scriptures and the Catechism to learn more.

In the end Jesus sums it up best. Rather than telling us to come walk on water, he say: **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** That is what faith does. Faith’s courage dares whatever our Lord commands.

How often aren’t we like Peter! We begin following our Lord, daring to live for him but then the doubts, the hardships, the luxuries of this world, and the criticism of others blow hard against us, and we begin to wonder if it is really worth it. Our Christian life begins to sink. We might not notice it at first as we drift away from Jesus and his Word. But if you distance yourself from his words, your faith can no longer focus on him alone. Such faith drowns in doubt.

Before it is too late, call out with Peter: **Lord, save me!**. And just as Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught Peter, so also he catches you before your faith drowns. How does his hand reach out? Through the Scriptures and the Sacraments. They are his hands that reach out to you and to me. Through them he says: **Take courage. I’m here. I’m here in the words of the Scriptures, the Word of God written down for you so that you may believe in me, God’s son, your Savior. I'm here when you were baptized. I washed your sins away. You were reborn as a child of God, so I’m here as your brother. I’m here in the Supper. In fact, I give you my body and blood to eat and drink. That’s how close I am to you. I’ve redeemed you to be my own forever. Take courage. I’m here.** Where is Jesus when you need him? He is right here in the Scriptures and the Sacraments reaching out to take you by the hand and to give your faith courage.

And so, my friends, no matter what the storms of life, faith’s courage overcomes your fears as you cling to Jesus’ words. He will take care of your needs. So boldly follow your Savior, for faith’s courage dares whatever he commands. Through the Scriptures and Sacraments he gives your faith the courage to do much greater things than walking on water. No matter how difficult it is to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow him, rely on his promise: **Take courage. I’m here!** Amen.

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