

Matthew 14:22-33
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Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

It is not so much that we have to hang on to Jesus. It is more that Jesus has to take hold of us. Have you ever saved someone from drowning? I was a senior in high school. It was a hot spring day and a bunch of us went to a local stone quarry to cool off. The water in those old quarries is always cold. Wally decided to swim across the quarry. When he was half way across, he got cramps and started going down. By the time we got to him, he was already under the water. One of my other buddies dove down and pushed him to the surface. Another buddy reached out to grab him, but Wally grabbed him by the head and they both went down. "Cullie" kicked free and swam away. I reached down and grabbed Wally by the hair and pulled him up. Before he could even catch his breath, I grabbed him around the neck from the back and pulled his chin up. I told him to relax and let me swim to the shore with him. When he finally stopped struggling and trusted me, it was easy to get him to safety.

That's how Jesus had to grab onto you in order to save you from your sins. When you were born, you were born with the deepest conviction that you could somehow save yourself. You didn't think you needed anyone but yourself. But you found yourself drowning in a sea of sin and trouble. Still you struggled wildly. Jesus had to grab onto you and hold you tight until you finally trusted in him. And if Jesus did not continue to hold onto us, we would never make it safely to heaven.

Precious Lord, Take My Hand!

It seemed that Peter had to get wet to learn this lesson. Jesus had just fed the five thousand on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Remember the context from last week? Jesus had just learned that his cousin, John, had been beheaded. He went away to a lonely place, but the crowds figured out where he was going and gathered there – well over 5,000 strong. Jesus had compassion on them and ministered to them all day. At the end of the day he fed them with five loaves of bread and two small fish. Then he dismissed the crowds and sent his disciples across the lake in a boat.

Then Jesus went up on the mountainside by himself to pray. Think about that for a moment. He worked all day. He was emotionally upset because his cousin and friend had been unjustly beheaded. We heard on the news this last week that an American was beheaded by ISIS and it upset all of us. Jesus was fully human and dealt with the same human emotions that we do. But it did not keep him from his prayers.

As I studied this story, I realized that I have absolutely no excuse for my lazy prayer life. So what if I am so tired that I cannot hold my eyes open before I go to bed at night? I could find a quiet room and walk around and say my prayers. If I am not a “night owl,” what about getting up just a little earlier in the morning and saying my prayers then? What about setting my alarm for three times during the day, like Daniel did, and use that time for prayer?

And did you notice the hour in the morning that Jesus saw the disciples struggling against the wind and waves? It was the fourth watch of the night, which was between four and six o'clock AM in the morning. Jesus spent half the night in prayer. I am thankful that Jesus prayed so diligently, because he was praying for me and for you. By that I do not mean that he was praying our names that night. I mean that he was praying in my place as the perfect child of God so that I by faith might claim his righteousness for myself.

This is the first reason we can hold onto Jesus. He is the perfect Son of God, and by faith in him, we have his righteousness and we are God's children, too.

So then what happens? In the middle of the night, Jesus sees his disciples struggling to hold their boat in a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee. Even today, the storms on Galilee can be sudden and horrific. The wind from the desert meets the cool air from the mountains and then rushes down valley across the lake. Have you ever tried to row a bit into a howling storm? If you have, you know that you have to pull your oars with all your might. You can't let up for a moment. And you go nowhere.

Our text says that it was the middle of the night and the boat was a considerable distance from shore – and yet Jesus saw that they were in trouble. We should stop and take note that there are several details in this story that prove that Jesus is really true God as well as being true man.

1. He saw them through the storm. Jesus sees us the same way – even if we are in the middle of a storm. Even if we are trying to do our best to hide from him. Even if we feel alone, we are never alone, because Jesus sees us and knows the trouble we are in at the moment.
2. Jesus decided to go out and help his disciples. He walked on the water. This was no cheap magician’s trick. Don’t listen to those people who think they have to rewrite the Bible and explain away Jesus’ miracles. The next time that you are at the swimming pool, concentrate all you can, step off the deck and walk on the water. I dare you. Jesus could do it because he is true God.
3. And the third evidence of Jesus’ divinity in our text? When Jesus climbed into the boat with Peter, the wind and the waves immediately died down. Who else but God alone is in control of the wind and waves? ***Jesus is God! This is the second reason you can reach out and hold on to Jesus, because Jesus is God.***

What else do we learn in our story? Put yourself in the boat with the disciples. Your arms are tired from rowing. You are beginning to lose hope in ever seeing dry land again. All of a sudden, you see someone walking to you on the water. At first they you think it is a ghost. And that must have really made them afraid. What would make you more afraid, seeing a ghost or being in a storm on the lake? They cried out in fear, and Jesus speaks to calm their fears. **“Take courage,” he says, “It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**

Then Peter does his thing. He is not one to hold back his feelings and emotions. He says, “Lord, if it is you, then tell me to come to you on the water.” Jesus invited Peter to come to him. He was good for that first step and maybe two, but when he saw wind and the waves and the wild sea, he doubted and began to sink. You have to give him this much credit. When he was in trouble, he did call out to Jesus. “Lord, save me!” Peter cried out. And what did Jesus do? Jesus reached out to Peter and grabbed hold of him. Peter did not grab on to Jesus, but Jesus grabbed on to Peter.

Friends, I think we all suffer from Peter’s problem – pride and presumption. Have you ever heard the old saying, “God helps those who help themselves?” That’s an awful thing to say. That’s just plain false doctrine, through and through. But it is what our Old Adam believes. We presume that we can do things without God’s help. It shows up in mundane things. Imagine you are a good farmer. You went to Ag school. You know everything there about raising corn. It is up to you to get a good crop out of that field. Up to you, right? That’s the wrong way to think, isn’t it? God has to send the rain. God has to keep the frost at bay in early September. God has to mature the crop in time. Who says we are in control?

Maybe you think you are a great mom. You have eyes behind your head. It is up to you to watch over your children and to make sure they grow up safe and sound and healthy of mind, body and spirit. In fact, you worry about your children all the time – because as much as

you think you are in control, you know that you are not. One of my favorite Psalms for parents is Psalm 127. **“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves.”** We can worry all we want but in the end, God has to watch over our children!

But the one thing we dare never presume is to think we can save ourselves from our sin. I would hope that none of you here today would be so proud, so presumptuous, that you think you can save yourself by keeping God’s commandments or by doing good works. That would negate for you all that Jesus has done to rescue you from your sins! But do you believe what you sing in one of those good old songs? “Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.”

But do we think that we must hold on to Jesus, that we must cling to him? Do we think that we are strong enough to keep a grip on Jesus? When the devil puts temptations in front of us that our sinful nature cannot resist, do we have the strength in ourselves to resist him? When the circumstances of our lives comes apart, like it did for Job in the Old Testament, do we think that we can hold it together and not lose our faith? Friends, if it were up to me to hold on to Jesus until the day I died, I know for sure that I would lose my grip on him and my salvation.

Precious Lord, take my hand! It is not that we can hold onto Jesus. It is that Jesus can hold on to us. The one who made the storm and the wind cease can hold onto you. The one who could walk on the water can keep you safe. The one who died and rose again in victory can surely make alive your new man every day so that you can walk with him in faith.

Precious Lord, take my hand! Tom Dorsey wrote that hymn. Do you know his story? Thomas loved music. At a very early age, long before his music education at the Chicago College of Composition and Arranging, he was playing piano in a Vaudeville act. After college, he frequented the jazz clubs, gaining quite a reputation as the very talented 'Georgia Tom'.

In 1921, at the age of 22, Thomas came to faith in Jesus. Almost immediately he left the jazz clubs and began writing Gospel music. He took great effort to circulate his musical scores, but it was three long years before anyone started to notice. Little by little his reputation grew, not only as a songwriter but as a church music director.

In 1932 while the now Reverend Dorsey was leading a church service, a man came on to the platform to hand him a telegram - his wife had just died in childbirth. Within 24 hours his newborn baby died also. Thomas quickly spiraled downward into the depths of despair, doubting the goodness of God and determining never to write another hymn.

A week after that horrible, life changing day, Thomas was deep into his grief, sitting alone at a piano, in a friend's music room. Into the room came a heavy peace such as he had never known before. As that peace enveloped him, Thomas felt the urge to play the piano. His fingers found a familiar melody and the words to *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* began to well up

from his heart and to spill out of his mouth. God had given him a song that would not only lift him from despair, but would also change the course of his music career.

It is not that we can hold on to Jesus. It is that Jesus will hold on to us. We can be proud. We make mistakes. We sin and we doubt. But Jesus will hold on to us. Amen.