

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³¹And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him...(Matthew 14:31, KJV)

There are many moving stories in the Bible about the gracious touch of Jesus. Peter's mother-in-law, for example, is sick with a fever:

And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.(Matthew 8:15)

Again, Jesus preaches his beautiful Sermon on the Mount, only to be met on the way down the mountain, not by beauty, but by leprosy. The leper man says to Jesus, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." And Jesus wills, and touches the man — lays hold on the very man whose disease inspires horror in others:

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.(Matthew 8:3)

Or, again, a funeral procession passes by Jesus, with the widow mother so very sad, along with many of the townsfolk. But Jesus reaches out his saving hand and gives the woman back her son:

¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. ¹⁴And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man,

I say unto thee, Arise. ¹⁵And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.(Luke 7:13-15)

There are many stories like this concerning the good touch of Jesus, and we will get to some of these stories during the course of this midweek Lent series now upon us. But I have strongly desired to start our series with this evening's story — the story of Jesus stretching forth his hand and catching Peter. Jesus must catch the man lest he die. And Jesus does catch him. To me, this is the perfect picture of the saving hand of Jesus: We are sinking, "far from the peaceful shore," as the old hymn puts it. But Jesus is glad to stretch out his hand and save us.

Let us notice the following points about Jesus saving Peter. First, Peter was but a man — a person like you and me. He was not an angel. He was not perfect. But Jesus counted him precious, as he counts you and me precious. Second, Peter had gotten himself into quite a plight. He found himself very much in need of a Saviour. And third, there is a sense in which Peter dragged Jesus down, down beneath the billowing waves. This is the mystery of the Cross. Let's consider these points one after another.

First, Peter was but a man. In the course of time, the Church has come to count Peter a saint, and perhaps you join me in being awfully glad that this is so. It pleases me a lot to think that such an

impulsive, twisting, turning man could end up a saint. It rather gives hope to the rest of us. But at this point in the Gospel story, no one is referring to Peter as a saint. Why, it was not all that long ago that Peter was a fisherman — not a disciple, not an apostle, not a fisher of men, but a plain, old fisher of fish. He is beset behind and before him by failure and sin. It will not be many chapters before Jesus will call him the shocking name, Satan:

But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.”(Matthew 16:23, RSV)

And, it will not be long before Holy Week will be upon us, and we will hear once again the story of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Before a maid, Peter’s courage shall melt away and he shall curse and swear of Jesus, “I know not the man”:

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.(Matthew 26:74, KJV)

No, when Jesus reaches out his hand and catches Peter, he is not rushing to rescue a saint, nor an apostle, nor an angel, but a plain person, same as you, same as me.

And so, brothers and sisters, do not imagine that you must somehow be something special on this earth to be saved by Jesus. Truth is, all you need is to be sinking. And perhaps you have some experience of that. Yes: for Jesus to reach out and save you, all you need is to be sinking and to have enough wits about you to cry out Peter’s short, perfect prayer, “Lord, save me.” If Jesus does not

save you straight out, in a way you can see and understand, surely he will save you that way in due time. And meanwhile, in the Blessed Sacrament he will stretch out his hand and give you a tangible token of his determination to save you. Indeed, he will give you his life, his very body and blood.

Second, when Jesus saved Peter, he saved a man who had gotten himself into quite a plight. With the best of intentions Peter had gotten himself in over his head. He had set out on a noble path — to walk on the water to Jesus — but staying that path required him to keep his eyes on Jesus. And that, he failed to do. The wind and waves bedazzled him, distracted him, discouraged him. Right in the midst of walking the good walk, the thought seems to have settled on him, “I cannot do this! Who am I to think that I can do such a tremendous thing as this: to walk on water.” And so, he began to sink.

Till we get to heaven, I fear that this shall always be so for us: that right in the midst of the good walk, the world shall vex us, our flesh shall tempt us, strangers on the sidewalk shall annoy us, and the devil shall practice his deceits on us, and we shall start to sink. Maybe you have some experience of that: sinking. Maybe I have some experience of it. Peter was in quite a plight, headed for Tommy Jones locker. But Jesus is stronger than any plight in which we might find ourselves. Jesus is able to reach out and save the sinner. He can do that for you and for me.

The third thing that catches my eye in this story is the cost Jesus is willing to pay to save us. This is the mystery of the Cross. For, you see, Jesus reaching out his hand to save Peter is also a symbol of an even greater salvation: salvation, not just from waves, but from a wasted life and a wasted eternity.

On our worship folder this evening, you see a close-up photograph of the left hand of Jesus from our altarpiece. You

see, don't you, something that we can hardly see from this distance: the mark of the nail in the hands of Jesus. It cost Jesus much to save this world. Our sins and the mess we have made of our lives were dragging us down. We were sinking deep in sin, and Jesus reached out and rescued us, only at a cost. It was as if in saving us from the waves, Jesus plunged under the waves himself. He let us step off his shoulders into the boat, while our stepping inevitably plunged him down, down beneath the billowing waves.

No matter, Jesus, says: No matter. You are that important to me!

And so it, that the touch of Jesus is a saving touch for the likes of you and me. And if Jesus must suffer that we might live, then suffering he accepts. Let us cherish henceforth the new chance for life which Jesus has won for us.

And to him be the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.