

Sunday, August 9, 2026

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 14 A

Matthew 14:22-33

Who Holds Your Hand?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My friends,

Have you ever walked
in the woods at night?

I can remember walking alone
through trees
at night as a kid.
In the darkness,
everything is different.
The strange noises trees make
as they shift in the wind sound alien.
The shadows are deeper.
They seem full of unseen,
watching eyes.
A rustle
in the leaves is startling.
The calm,
familiar path of the day
is suddenly alarming.

But walking that same dark path
with Dad holding my hand?
The squeaks and chitters
of moving branches
seem a friendly chat.
The shadows are still deep.
But any hidden eyes see Dad.
And who will mess with him?
A rustle in the leaves is something leaving.
The path is calm and familiar again.

Now,
 as a Dad myself,
 I've held my children's hands.
 And I've noticed,
 the more scared they were,
 the tighter they gripped my hand.
 But was their safety ever relying
 on the strength of their grip?
 When we look back,
 we realize something different.
 We weren't safe
 because we held tightly.
 We were safe
 because Dad wasn't going to let go.

But it's not just children who get scared.
 Now,
 when your life gets dark & scary—
 who is holding your hand?

I. Everything Else Let's Go v.22-26

My friends,
 Life had certainly gotten scary
 for the Disciples.
 Their "*boat was beaten
 by the waves,
 for the wind was against them.*"
 That word "*beaten*" carries the sense
 of torment
 and harassment.
 The wind is against them.
 Their tormented boat is failing.
 It's the fourth watch—
 the final watch—
 of the night.
 Their strength is failing.
 They're exhausted.
 They're not making any more progress.
 And the boat holding them up is beaten.

They've reached the point
 where nothing created can save them.

Sometimes,
 the things
 that normally carry us
 begin to fail.
 That could be a boat.
 But it could also be your body,
 your health.
 Or your money.
 Your job.
 Your plans.
 Your house.
 Your relationships.
 Your family.
 Your fortitude.
 Your optimism.
 Your fellow church members.
 Your pastor.
 Or even the laws and courts.
 These things we rely on—
 they can all fail.

And shockingly,
 even God's help can seem frightening.
 Sometimes,
 God's arrival is scarier than the storm.
*"But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea,
 they were terrified,
 and said, 'It is a ghost!'
 and they cried out in fear."* (Matthew 14:26)
 Sometimes,
 God's answer to our prayer doesn't look
 like the answer we expected.
 The Disciples literally mistake salvation
 for another threat.

Jesus arrives
on the storm-tossed waves.
The waves
that tormented the boat
are carrying Jesus.
God often comes hidden
under weakness.
He arrives
in the trouble.
He is found
in sorrow
and suffering.
We see Him
in the manger
and on the cross
more often
than in the throne
or the garden.

Who holds your hand
when everything else fails?
The Son of God.

Jesus arrives walking on the sea.
Into all their fear comes His Word:
*“Take heart;
it is I.
Do not be afraid.”* (Matthew 14:27)

The storm has not stopped.
The wind hasn't changed.
But already everything has changed.
Why?
Because Jesus has come.

II. Jesus Takes Hold v.28-31

However,
my friends,
St. Peter still doubts.
Peter wants certainty.
“Lord,
if it is you,
command me
to come to you
on the water.” (Matthew 14:28)
It's a very human reaction.
Often,
we doubt
that Jesus is truly
with us in our storms.
“Lord,
if it is you,
command me
to come to you
on the water. ”

Then a miracle happens.
A terrified
and doubting
St. Peter steps
out of the boat.
Why?
Because Jesus says, “Come!”
God's Word graciously creates
what it commands.
Peter doesn't hop
out of the boat
because He is bold.
Peter steps
onto the water
because Christ spoke.
St. Peter walks
on water
because Christ's Word is powerful.

*“He said, “Come!”
 So Peter got out of the boat
 and walked
 on the water
 and came
 to Jesus.” (Matthew 14:29)*

But then,
 something happens.
 St. Peter stops trusting the Word
 that brought him
 onto the sea.
 When he saw the wind,
 he was afraid
 and began to sink.
 Again he doubts.
 He looks
 to the wind
 to understand
 what’s happening.
 He lets the storm define reality
 for him,
 rather than trusting
 what Jesus has spoken.
 But even in that moment
 of terrible doubt,
 the gift of faith was there.
*“But when [Peter] saw the wind,
 he was afraid,
 and beginning
 to sink he cried out,
 ‘Lord, save me!’” (Matthew 14:30)*

And then comes the beautiful Gospel moment:

*“Immediately
Jesus stretched out His hand
and took hold of him.”* (Matthew 14:31a)
Immediately.
Jesus doesn’t hesitate.
Jesus doesn’t wait for more faith.
Jesus doesn’t wait
for promises of trying better.
Jesus doesn’t chide Peter
while he wallows deeper
into the water.
No, “I told you so!”
Just,
*“Immediately
Jesus stretched out His hand
and took hold of him.”*

“Lord,
save me!”
Peter cries.
And immediately,
Jesus saves him.
*“for ‘Whoever will call
on the name of the Lord
will be saved.’”* (Romans 10:13)

It's *‘Whoever will call,’*
not whoever
has strong enough faith.
Not whoever
is righteous enough
or obedient enough.
Not whoever
has no doubt.
It's *‘Whoever will call
on the name of the Lord
will be saved.’*

*“The cords of death encompassed me;
 the torrents of destruction assailed me;
 the cords of Sheol entangled me;
 the snares of death confronted me.
 In my distress
 I called upon the Lord;
 to my God
 I cried for help.
 From His temple
 He heard my voice,
 and my cry to Him
 reached His ears...
 He sent from on high,
 He took me;
 He drew me out
 of many waters.” (Psalm 18:4-6,16)*

Christians don't survive
 because they never sink.
 Christians survive
 because Jesus catches sinking sinners.
 Who holds your hand when your faith falters?
 Jesus!

Is doubt a sin?
 Yes.
 But what do you do
 with sin?
 You take it
 to Jesus.

In the book of Mark,
 there is another terrified person.
 A father
 who cannot help his child.
 He can't rescue his little boy.
 So he goes to Jesus.
*“...if You can do anything,
 have compassion
 on us
 and help us.”*

*And Jesus said to him,
 “‘If you can’!
 All things are possible
 for one who believes.”
 Immediately the father
 of the child
 cried out
 and said,
 ‘I believe;
 help my unbelief!’
 Jesus... rebuked the unclean spirit,
 saying to it,
 ‘You mute and deaf spirit,
 I command you,
 come out of him
 and never enter him again.’” (Mark 9:22–25)*

You see,
 rescue depends on Jesus,
 not us.
 He is merciful.
*“If we walk in the light,
 as He is in the light,
 we have fellowship with one another,
 and the blood
 of Jesus His Son
 cleanses us
 from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)*
“All sin” includes doubt.

Pastor is NOT saying,
 ‘go ahead and doubt.
 Doubting is alright.’
 I’m saying,
 don’t let your doubt stop you
 from calling on Jesus.
 Bring your doubt
 to Jesus.
 Doubt is sin.
 Confess it.
 Repent it.
 Ask Him to deal with it.

Confess your doubt,
 but declare your faith.
*'I believe;
 help my unbelief!'*

Who holds your hand
 when your faith falters?
 The Son of God.

III. The Hand that Holds You v.32-33

My friends,
 Jesus holds you.
 And that is not a little thing.
*"And when they got
 into the boat,
 the wind ceased.
 And those
 in the boat
 worshiped Him,
 saying,
 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"* (Matthew 14:32–33)

The Disciples begin to realize
 the Son of God holds them.
 They don't pat Peter
 on the back.
 "Oh Peter,
 you're so bold."
 "What big faith you must have."
 No,
 events have shown
 that they and Peter
 are all small and weak.
 The miracle has revealed
 who Christ is.
 Truly the Son of God.

And that makes all the difference.
 Do you know that campfire song?
 "With Jesus in my boat,
 I can smile at the storm..."

The Son of God

makes the storms of life seem small.

The One who holds you
is the One who laid the foundations
of the earth.

He gives meaning
and purpose
to creation,

making the angels shout for joy.

The One holding you sets limits
on the chaotic sea.

*“Thus far shall you come,
and no farther,
and here your proud waves shall be stopped!”*

The One holding you
has defeated the darkness
and will bring the dawn
that will shake the wicked
from the world
and break the arms
of the evil ones.

The One holding you
has seen the *“gates of death”*
and dashed them.

(Job 38:4-18)

This is the One
who holds your hand
in the dark, stormy night!

The One who walked

over the sea
also sank
into the depths
of death.

The One who reached
into the water
reached even farther
into the grave
to rescue sinners.

By cross
and resurrection,
He commands the morning
that will raise the dead.
Jesus is the Son of God,
and He holds you
in His hand.

*“My sheep hear My voice,
and I know them,
and they follow Me.
I give them eternal life,
and they will never perish,
and no one will snatch them
out of My hand.
My Father,
who has given them
to Me,
is greater than all,
and no one is able
to snatch them
out of the Father’s hand.
I and the Father are one.”* (John 10:27–30)

Who holds your hand
when death itself seems near?
Jesus,
the Son of God.

So call upon Him,
*“for ‘Whoever will call
on the name of the Lord
will be saved.’”*
For Jesus says,
*“All that the Father gives Me
will come to Me,
and whoever comes to Me
I will never cast out.”* (John 6:37)

My friends,
Your comfort is not
that you are holding Jesus tightly enough.
Your comfort is
that Jesus has taken hold
of you,
and the Son of God
never lets go
of those
who call upon Him.

As children,
we thought we were holding Dad's hand.
The truth was
the whole time Dad's hand
was holding ours.
That's the Christian life.
We imagine our hope rests
on how tightly
we cling to Christ.
But our hope rests
on something far stronger:
Christ has taken hold
of us.

The hand that stretched out
to St. Peter
is the same hand stretched out
to us
on the cross.
The hand pierced
for your salvation
is the hand
that still holds you.
Storms will come.
Nights will be dark.
The wind will howl.
Waves will beat us.
But the Son of God has promised
to never let go.

You are not alone
in the dark.
Not alone
in the storm.
The Son of God holds you.
And because He holds you,
the night will end.
The storm will cease.
And the dawn
of the resurrection
will come.

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*