

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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MIRACLES

the hope and fear of being awestruck

by Drew Downs

Jesus feeds thousands of people with almost nothing. An incredible act which captivates our imagination.

Then he walks on water, frightening his disciples by the seeming limitlessness of his power.

Like Peter, we approach miracles like they are all wonderful and inspiring. Much like a vision of prayer that is all requests for healing and

fortune. To have our circumstances be changed underneath us. Always for (what we perceive as) the better.

Many of Jesus's miracles, however, lead to fear and confusion. Not because he himself is terrifying. But because he is expressing true power. Power to dramatically change things.

No wonder we'd rather think positive. We already have the power to change things.

ORDINARY TIME

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Speaking

On August 9th, we celebrated a modern saint, Edith Stein, Philosopher, Monastic, and Martyr. Born a Jew in Germany in 1891, Edith converted to Christianity in the 1920s. This would not protect her from being a victim of genocide, however, as she died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942. Her story resonates today.

Here is an excerpt from Lesser Feasts and Fasts:

Back in 1933, Edith had written forcefully to the pope, beseeching him to condemn the actions of the Nazi government. "Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself 'Christian.' For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ's name. Is not this idolization of race and governmental power which is being pounded into the public consciousness by the radio open heresy? Isn't the effort to destroy Jewish blood an abuse of the holiest humanity of our Savior, of the most blessed Virgin and the apostles? Is not all this diametrically opposed to the conduct of our Lord and Savior, who, even on the cross, still prayed for his persecutors? And isn't this a black mark on the record of this Holy Year which was intended to be a year of peace and reconciliation? We all, who are faithful children of the Church and who see the conditions in Germany with open eyes, fear the worst for the prestige of the Church, if the silence continues any longer."

Her letter received no response.

With love,
Drew

ORDINARY TIME

2023

FOR SUNDAY

Proper 14A

August 13, 2023

Collect

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

PENTECOST

Reflection

There are two boat moments in the gospels. And they both have to do with fear.

In Matthew, the first comes in chapter 8, when there is a big storm, threatening to destroy the boat and the disciples in it. And Jesus just makes the storm go away. Which freaks the disciples out *more than the storm*. Because, up to that point, they assumed Jesus's power was just healing people. Not weather manipulation.

This second story comes immediately after our favorite miracle, when Jesus feeds thousands of people on some bread and fish. And, again, he makes them afraid by exercising his power. This time, by walking on water.

I remind myself of their fear because I'm likely to be all "Jesus can do anything!" like it's automatically a good thing—and not something that actually *would* terrify me in real life. As if seeing someone walk on water *wouldn't* freak any of us out.

It's like watching superheroes in movies and being all "just fly already" or thinking that, unlike those dopes on the screen, we'd be all calm about somebody lifting up a car.

Of course, I don't know what to do with this fear exactly. But I think Jesus does give us some sense of that part. Because he puts fear against faith—not as opposites or even opponents. These aren't all-or-nothing concepts. But that fear has a negating character to faith.

My favorite part of this story is that Peter is so excited to join in the miracle, that he asks to do what Jesus can do. *He asks for the power*. And Jesus gives it to him. And Peter literally walks on water. Of course, it doesn't last. The fear gets in the way. But he does it. And there's something about this. That we'd rather focus on the sinking than the doing.

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