

The Gospel today is a story about faith, faith and deliverance through faith. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he said, in so many words, “If it is you Lord, then let me come to you.” Often times in life, we start out strongly in faith; but when we take on a little stress, anxiety trumps our faith and we yield to fear. Jesus rescued a doubting Peter, and we know from the story that Jesus is our deliverance.

There is another story in the Bible, in the Old Testament that is not part of our lessons for today. Nonetheless, it is a story that I often associate with this gospel passage in Matthew. Most mainline protestant scholars treat the story as fiction, but fictional or factual, it carries a strong teaching point about faith. I’m talking about the story of Jonah, catching a ride on a slow whale to Nineveh. This is truly a biblical short story; the whole thing is less than three pages in the Bible. It is fun to read; a classic in story telling. How do I relate this story to Matthew’s passage? Well aside from the fact that both have a nautical theme, both are stories of faith and both are stories of deliverance. In the Gospel story, our Lord’s disciples were caught in a storm at sea. In Jonah’s story, his boat was also caught in a storm at sea. Jonah was reckoned the cause of the foul weather and the ship’s crew tossed him overboard. God the Father rescued him. In this story of doubting Peter, his doubt jeopardized his life. The Lord of Life, who calmed the raging waters, rescued him. The stories challenge us. Modern and educated people sometimes have difficulty with these stories, difficulties that the people of our Lord’s day did not have. But the important thing is not the miracles, themselves. Don’t get hung up on the miracles. Let these stories convey a deeper truth: when you ask God for help, he is listening. Don’t be surprised when he answers.

In the story of Jonah, the wayward prophet gets tossed overboard by anxious sailors during a strong storm. The reason was that Jonah was on the ship was to run away from what God wanted him to do and where God wanted him to go. God said, “Go to Nineveh.” Jonah bought passage on a boat to Tarshish. To stop him, in the story, God kicked up a storm. Anxious sailors figured out that Jonah was the cause of the jam they were in and tossed him overboard, trying to appease the Jewish God. Alas, in the process, Jonah got himself swallowed up by a whale; the Bible actually says a “great fish,” but does it really matter? The whale found him so distasteful that he heaved him up. Guess where? You got it! Through the whale, God deposited him right on the shore of Nineveh, where God wanted Jonah to be in the first place. The point of the story is this: God is a god ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abiding in steadfast love. This is the reality of our God. He loves us with all of his being, as he asks us to love him. And he is faithful to us and watches over us. Ultimately, in Christ, God rescues us from ourselves and brings us to his Heavenly home. Another reality that we have to factor in is that ultimately God is in charge of this world, not us. This is clearly a part of the Jonah story that we have to take to heart: God will get what he wants.

In Matthew's gospel reading for this morning, Jesus defied the laws of nature to rescue his friends. The point of the story is not our Lord walking on water. The point is that in their moment of greatest despair, our Lord's disciples experienced the delivering power of the presence of God. Picture the scene, a small boat in a large sea, gale-force winds, and heavy seas. At any moment, this vessel could capsize. These men believed that they were about to die. We can understand this fear. In the midst of the storm, Jesus came to his disciples and calmed the seas. He rescued them from the wind and the waves.

The point of the story is the same as it is with Jonah. God is a god of mercy. God is a god of love. God is in charge of his world and the Lord delivers. There are many times and many ways when we feel a bit like Jonah. When Jonah found himself facing death, he remembered his Creator. "The waters closed in over me, the deep was around me, I was trapped in the bars of the depths, and yet you, O Lord, brought me up from the depths. *When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord. Deliverance belongs to the Lord.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus gently chastised his disciples for doubting. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" We should never doubt that God is with us every day of our lives and that his love and his mercy endure forever. Then we can exclaim, as those in Peter's boat did, when the wind had died down and the sea was calm. "Truly, you are the Son of God!" *Amen.*