

Romans 10:5-15, Matthew 14:22-33

The name of Jesus is not a religious formula but the presence of the risen Lord - near enough to hear our cry, reorder our ordinary life, and send us with good news. *Jesus is near enough to save us, steady us, and send us.*

Opening: When the Holy Becomes Familiar

Friends, some of you know the vessel in front of us as a baptismal font. Most Sundays, we treat it like a flowerpot. The stone has not changed, but what it holds has. Once it was associated with water and a sacred moment. Now it holds soil, roots, and growing life.

Perhaps the flowers have been preaching to us. We are tempted to place the holy in one container and ordinary life in another. We put worship over here and work over there. Prayer belongs to Sunday; anxiety waits for Monday. Jesus has a place in the sanctuary, but the bills, the diagnosis, the family tension, the board meeting, and the long night seem to belong to another world.

I once wrote that all too often we segment our pursuit of God from everyday, ordinary life rather than seeing all of life encompassed within it. I still believe that. Holiness is not a religious compartment. It is the life of Christ taking root in the whole person.

That is why Paul says, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart" (Romans 10:8 NIV).

Scripture Reading:

If you have a bible open them to Romans. No bible? Grab the pew bible in front of you...

Read Romans 10:5-15

The saving word is not hidden beyond our reach. Christ is not confined to the sanctuary or reserved for people who have learned the right religious language. The risen Lord comes near - near enough to be trusted, near enough to be named, near enough to be called upon from the middle of real life.

And Matthew takes that promise and puts it on dark water in a hard wind.

Scripture Reading:

Let's turn to Matthew, Chapter 14, verse 22.

Read Matthew 14:22-33

This is the Word of the Lord. [*Thanks be to God.*]

The Storm Reveals What Has Our Attention

The disciples are in the boat because Jesus sent them there. This storm is not evidence that they missed God. Obedience has carried them directly into a night they cannot manage. The wind is against them, the waves are striking the boat, and Jesus is not where they expect him to be.

Some storms arrive because of choices we have made. Others arrive even when we have been faithful. A relationship shifts. The doctor calls. A child struggles. A church becomes anxious. Something we thought was secure begins moving beneath our feet. We can do the right thing and still find the wind against us.

Then, shortly before dawn, Jesus comes walking toward them. They see him, but fear interprets his presence as another threat. That is what anxiety does. It can make the help of God look frightening because it does not arrive in the form we expected.

Jesus speaks before the disciples understand: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (Matthew 14:27 NIV). His first gift is not an explanation of the storm. His first gift is himself.

Peter steps from the boat and, for a moment, walks toward Jesus. Then he notices the wind. The storm has been there all along; what changes is where Peter's attention settles. The wind becomes more defining than the One standing before him.

I know something about an overactive mind. I can plan, solve, anticipate, and carry responsibility. Those can be useful gifts. Under pressure, however, they can become an attempt to control what only God can hold. I begin rehearsing conversations, defending myself against things that have not happened, or trying to repair everyone and everything at once.

That is one place holiness becomes personal. Holiness is not only what I believe when life is calm. Holiness is what Christ forms in me when pressure rises. It is the grace to return my attention to Jesus before anxiety decides who I will become.

Peter is not saved by the strength of his concentration. The Gospel is not that a courageous disciple manages to stay above the waves. Peter begins to sink, and his prayer becomes very short: "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30 NIV).

The Saving Hand Comes Before the Lesson

Peter does not offer a polished confession. He does not explain how he reached this condition. He does not promise to do better if Jesus gives him one more chance. He calls upon the Lord.

And Matthew says, "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him" (Matthew 14:31 NIV). Immediately. Before Peter repairs his faith, Jesus reaches for him. Before Peter can climb back to safety, Jesus catches him. Before Jesus speaks about his doubt, Jesus saves him.

The correction comes after the saving hand. The lesson is not the price Peter pays to receive mercy. Mercy arrives first.

We often reverse that order. We imagine that if we can make our faith strong enough, clean up our life thoroughly enough, or explain our failure convincingly enough, then Jesus may reach toward us. But Peter is not standing on the water when the hand comes. He is sinking. The hand is grace. The holiness that follows is not payment for being rescued; it is the life mercy begins forming in the person Christ has caught.

This is Romans 10:13 with the water rising around it: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13 NIV). The name of Jesus is not a password that unlocks divine help. To call on Jesus is to entrust ourselves to Jesus - crucified for sinners, raised by the Father, reigning as Lord, and present by the Holy Spirit.

The saving word is near because the Savior is near.

The same Lord is Lord of all. No one has earned a privileged place above the water, and no one is disqualified from crying out beneath it. We come by the same mercy, to the same Lord, through the same saving name.

Sometimes rescue is immediate, as when Peter sank. Sometimes it unfolds through years, as when Joseph was lifted from a pit and carried into a story he could not yet understand. Sometimes God meets us quietly, as Elijah discovered in the gentle divine presence.

Those Who Call Become Those Who Carry

Calling on the Lord does not promise that every storm ends on our timetable. It promises Christ is near - near enough to save us when we sink and steady our scattered attention.

When my own thoughts scatter, I return to an ancient prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." It does not end every storm. It returns me to the living Center. I am not the source. Christ is. I am not the Savior. Jesus is.

Years ago I preached a message called Changing Our World. I still believe the Gospel changes the world, but not because we master every storm or become the answer. We carry the name of the One who reached for us.

Romans does not end with the person who calls. Paul moves from calling to believing, hearing, proclaiming, and being sent. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Romans 10:15 NIV). Those who call upon Jesus become those who carry him. Mercy received becomes mercy made visible.

Those feet carry Christ's peace into ordinary places where the wind has become louder than hope.

Perhaps the flowers have been preaching. Holiness is meant to take root in ordinary life and travel beyond this room.

Holy Response

As we enter Open Worship, sit with this query: Where has the wind become larger than Christ in my attention?

If the water is rising, pray with Peter: "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30 NIV). If Christ has steadied you, ask whom he is sending you toward. Go gently - not as the hero, but as one who knows the saving hand.

The word is near because the Savior is near. Jesus is near enough to save us, steady us, and send us.

Call on the name of the Lord.