

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
August 9, 2020
Rev. YoungMin Kim

Staring at Jesus
Matthew 14:22-33

(1)

There are many things that we should consider when we first learn how to ride a bicycle (and I think this is also applicable when we learn how to drive a car). Bicycle beginners tend to turn the bicycle handles to the left when they turn their heads to the left, and vice versa. For this reason, major and minor accidents occur. That is why I kept reminding my son of this when we rode bicycles together. Wherever we look either left or right side, we should fix the bicycle handle. By doing so, we can go straight safely no matter where we look and what happens around us.

In today's passage, Jesus's most beloved disciple, Peter, failed to stare at Jesus and turned his handles away from Jesus. As a result, he sank into the water. And Jesus told him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Through the passage, let us examine what happened to Peter.

(2)

According to the Lectionary schedule, we read Matthew 14:22-33. After Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, who was Jesus's cousin and who baptized Jesus with water, Jesus withdrew from people including His disciples in a boat to a deserted place by Himself. He might have needed time alone. However, people who really could not possibly know Jesus's agony followed Him. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a great crowd and had compassion on them and cured their sicknesses. Evening came. Jesus's disciples realized that the crowds were hungry, so the disciples asked Jesus about sending them to the village and buying food for themselves. But Jesus told them not to do so and asked His disciples to give them food. Five loaves of bread and two fish! That was all they had. The five loaves and two fish absolutely fell short for Jesus and His disciples to alleviate their hunger. Jesus said, "Bring them here to me." And then, He looked up to heaven, blessed, and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. That evening, those who ate and were filled were about five thousand men, besides women and children. This is one of Jesus's greatest miracles, the so-called "Miracle of Five Loaves and Two Fish" or "Feeding the Five Thousand." The disciples experienced the greatness of the Son of God.

As the evening advanced, the crowds returned to their homes, and Jesus and His disciples were left alone. Jesus left His disciples and went up to a mountain by Himself to pray. And I guess the disciples tried to cross back over the Sea of Galilee to spend the night. By the way, a strong wind came, and they could not move even an inch. Without their Master in the boat, they might have felt the peril of death on a pitch-dark night in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. Hours later, the disciples—who were completely exhausted with fear and despair—saw a man walking on the sea, and they were terrified because they believed that

He was a ghost. When they cried out in fear, Jesus immediately spoke to them, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” After they discerned their Master’s face in a short distance, they finally might have felt relieved.

At that moment, I have no idea what possessed Peter to ask Jesus such a thing. He said to Jesus, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (v. 28). “Come!” Jesus replied (v. 29). Peter jumped out of the boat without any hesitation, started walking on the Sea of Galilee, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened and began to sink. He cried out saying, “Lord, save me!” Jesus rebuked Peter, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind ceased.

(3)

A few hours before this happened, the disciples experienced a great miracle of Jesus feeding five thousand or more people with five loaves of bread and two fish. After that, rather than staying with Jesus on the mountain or at the foot of the mountain, they decided to cross the Sea of Galilee back by themselves to take a break and spend the night. When they met a strong wind in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the very dark night, they became panicked and tried to escape from the place for themselves. However, it did not work well. The more they made desperate efforts, the more they became exhausted and fell into despair. In panic, fear, and despair, they did not recognize their Master who walking on the water, because in their common sense they thought that a man—even Jesus—could not walk on water. After they discerned that it was Jesus, Peter asked Jesus to command him to walk on the water, and he actually did...when he stared at Jesus. But Peter immediately sank when he failed to stare at Jesus and looked at what was going on around him—a strong wind, dark night, and the sea. And it made him feel frightened. Jesus rebuked him, saying, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” But while reading this story, can we also say to Peter, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

(4)

Throughout our whole lives, whether we recognize it or not, we have received and experienced countless blessings of God’s grace and love. Nevertheless, a few hours later, we forget such love and grace and decide to navigate our lives by our own efforts rather than remaining in God. While navigating, we come to confront strong winds in the middle of our lives, and again, we try to escape from them for ourselves. However, it never works out well. The more we make desperate efforts, the more we become exhausted and fall into despair. And our panic, fear, stress, and despair cover our spiritual eyes so that we do not recognize that our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is with us. If we keep staring at Jesus, no matter what happens around us, we will not waver even in the middle of the sea in the dark night. However, once we notice the strong wind, we fail to stare at Jesus; we will be immediately frightened by even a small thing. Both believers and non-believers will meet strong winds in their lives, but the decisive difference between the two is that believers remember God’s love and grace that have been poured out on them, stare at Jesus, and let Jesus navigate their lives.