

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, A ✠ D 2011

Matins Catechetical Preaching

Matthew 8:23-27

Based on the Lutheran Catechesis Series, Lesson 15

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 There they were in the boat with Jesus. They had left the multitudes, been called out from the crowds. So have you, disciple, been called out from the multitudes, out from the crowds, out from the nations, to belong to your Lord. The disciples of Christ are called always called away from the crowds into the boat with their Lord.

2 Stories of boats and raging seas abound in Holy Scripture. Most prominent is that of Noah and the flood. The Lord sent the flood of water upon the earth in judgment against man's sin and unbelief. Through the water and the ark that God provided, Noah and his family, eight in all, were rescued from sin and the unbelief of their generation and the judgment of God. They received this salvation through faith in the Lord's promise, which brought them into the safety of the ark. The apostle Peter declares that the flood corresponds to the salvation God provides through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: "God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you" (1 Peter 3:20-21). Through the raging waters, God called His people away from unbelief and unbelievers.

3 Water as a means through which God calls people away from the crowds, away from the civilizations of unbelievers is prominent in God's delivering His people Israel from slavery in Egypt, bringing them safely through the Red Sea. Later, God brought His people into the Promised Land through the water of the Jordan River. Each time, God is saving His people from the hand of their enemies. God's people are being pursued by Satan, filled with doubt, and tormented by their own sins. And God's action to save them is always based purely upon grace, not the merit or worthiness of His people. These stories all foreshadow the salvation God provides for His people through Holy Baptism.

4 There is also Jonah. In attempting to run away from the call of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the Ninevites, whom Jonah hated, Jonah fled to a ship headed in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. While in the ship, a great storm arose and began to tear the ship apart. If it hadn't been for the sacrifice of Jonah into the raging waters of the sea, the ship and her company would have been destroyed. Jonah, however, does not signify Baptism. He is not saved from the raging waters in the safety of the ship. The ship is saved by Jonah being offered to the sea. Jonah, the man overboard, hurled to his certain death in a raging sea, foreshadows Christ, the God-man hurled into the sea of God's wrath, in order to save those in the shelter of the ship.

5 If it hadn't been for Jesus taking your place under the wrath of God, you would have been lost. He was cast overboard into the stormy seas of God's judgment in order to redeem a people for Himself. The Church is filled with believers who had been the Lord's enemies. Through the water of Holy Baptism, you have been rescued from God's judgment and brought

into the safety of the holy Christian Church. The Church is often likened to a ship, as the place where God assembles His congregation to bestow His gifts in the Divine Service is called the nave, from the Latin word for “ship.”

6 Jesus, who was cast out into judgment for you, is rescued from the sleep of death and stands again in the safety of the ship as her Captain. No one enters the ship of the Church but through Baptism, which unites every disciple with the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. He is the Church’s Head and Captain, who guides her through the stormy seas of sin, temptation, persecution, suffering, doubt, unbelief, and death through His life-creating and saving Word. It is not the strength of the faith of the baptized to which you cling, but Christ’s Word of forgiveness and grace to which you cling, particularly in the midst of the fiercest struggles to believe in His promises.

7 The prayer of Christians, even though filled with doubt, despair, and anguish of soul, claims the promise of Christ’s deliverance in the Gospel. Jesus stills the storm. His Word silences the wind and the wave. He acts for the good of His Church and her members, not because of the strength of their faith, but because of the promise of His grace. The disciples’ cry, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” reflects the struggle that the Church and every Christian experiences with the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

8 All our prayers as Christians, and the prayers of the Church corporately, are mingled with doubt, fear, despair, and grief because of sin, temptation, persecution, and suffering. Nevertheless, the Lord always acts for your salvation and preservation, not because of the strength of your faith, but because of Christ, and in spite of the weakness of your faith or the poverty of your fallen nature. This is good news indeed, and the source of strength for the Christian’s life of prayer and for the prayer of the Church.

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