

*Immediately Jesus said to them, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid...” (Matthew 14:27)*

Throughout the centuries the Church has been pictured as a boat. Christians would draw it on walls and carve it in stone, in part because the mast would hide the picture of the cross. This idea is even a part of church architecture. The part of a church building where the congregation sits is called the ‘nave,’ from the Latin word meaning ‘boat.’ The Church is understood to be the place of safety in a world that, like the symbol of the sea, is a place of chaos and death. Remember Genesis 1? The earth was formless and void. Yet, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. God cannot be overcome by chaos and death. No, God himself overcomes the worst the devil and the world can throw at us. In fact, the Church itself has been built by the Son of God, the same Jesus who walked on the water during the storm. The Church has been built by the wood of the cross, where Jesus gave himself up to the powers of chaos, sin, and death. Yet, just as Jesus was battered by the worst of the world, God delivered him from death and brought him to new life. The world may toss Jesus’ followers to and fro with persecutions and false promises. But, God brings us through to the other side. We have died with Christ and been buried with him through the waters of Baptism. God has saved us by bringing us into the ‘boat’ of his Church.

People may embolden you to “get out of the boat.” We may not want to walk on water like Peter did, but we may want to look high and mighty in front of our friends. We may not need to see a miracle, but we sure want the ability to be someone powerful and do amazing things in life, so that people will respect us and remember us. We may not want our names taken off the church rolls, but we may think we don’t need the Church to be Christians. Is that the life to which Jesus has called us?

I encourage you all, *stay in the boat*. It may seem, at times, like Jesus is far away. But, he is with us, even right next to us, in his Church, just as he promised. He is with you through his Word. He is with you as you remember your Baptism. He is with you when he feeds you not with bread and wine alone, but with his very body and blood. You don’t have to leave the boat to find Jesus – he comes to you in the boat! It’s in the boat that we see Jesus as the Son of God and worship him! It’s here that Jesus speaks to us, reveals himself, and calms our fears. Jesus will be coming to his Church, and when he comes again for all to see, there will be no more fear. We will see his face and know that it is he, our Lord, and will be with him forever. For now, like David in Psalm 69, when we cry out because it feels like *the waters have come up to my neck* (v. 1); when we cry out to God for deliverance when we feel like we’re sinking (v. 14); we remember that *Yahweh hears the needy and does not despise his own people* (v. 33). Yes, we realize that *zeal for your house has consumed me* (v. 9). Brothers and sisters in Christ, *stay in the boat*. It’s where Jesus comes to meet you, to be gracious to you, and to save you from all that causes you to fear.

-Pastor Squire

“Through toil and tribulation and tumult of her war she waits the consummation of peace forevermore till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest, and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.”

(“The Church’s One Foundation” *LSB* 644, v. 4)