

8-18-2019 Jesus Walks on the Water

© T. Hardenbrook

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

If you were listening, just a few minutes ago, before the Trisagion hymn, we were singing about the Transfiguration of Christ, which we begin celebrating tonight and tomorrow morning with the Divine Liturgy, the blessing of the fruits, our hike up to the highest point in our little area here.

And in singing about the Transfiguration, the line was said that Christ is transfigured for our salvation. Christ is transfigured for our salvation. And that might sound sort of like something that ought to be said in an Orthodox church. It's very poetic. It's a beautiful statement, and yet knowing that what we pray is what we believe and what we believe is what we pray, in the Orthodox church, everything that is said has a meaning, has a theological reality, has something for us to learn that maybe we haven't paid attention to.

I'm very thankful, as an individual person, that Christ is transfigured for my salvation. I really am. I hope that you are too. But what in the world does that mean? What does it mean? And in order to really understand the coming Feast of the Transfiguration, we should look back a little bit. And it's not accidental that last week, we had the story of the feeding of the 5,000 and this week, we have Christ and ultimately Peter as well walking on the water.

So let's go back a little bit. In order to understand the Transfiguration, let's go back a little bit and remember first of all, who is Christ? Who is Jesus Christ? If he is transfigured for our salvation, who is he in the first place? And we rewind all the way back to before the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus gets into a boat and takes off because he's tired. He's tired. He has been working with the people. He has been working miracles and teaching and he is exhausted.

How can that be? He is the Son of God. How is it that he can be tired? Well, we learn because he is fully divine, but in his humanity, he is fully human as well. We must never, ever, ever forget that. We worship a God, the Logos, the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who became man fully for our salvation. And so after walking and talking and teaching and working miracles and being around people, asking all sorts of questions, some of them coming and asking good questions, others coming to tempt him, and to test him, to see who he really is, to see if he's keeping the Law. Maybe they should arrest him and kill him. He's tired. He's tired. So he gets into the boat and he goes off to a place where he can be by himself or at least be with just a few people with whom He can rest.

This is a great example for us. We better be doing the same thing in our Christian life, in our imitation of Him. But as life goes ... think about you wanting to finally get some rest and you go off and you make a plan and you take off. You leave all the kids behind, maybe your spouse too, and you get to the place where you're wanting to go ... every time you've been there before, no one's been there to bother you. You rested really well. And you arrive and just when you've got out the recliner and you're putting up your feet, the whole extended family arrives, uninvited.

And he gets to the place where he is going and the multitude has gone along the shore of the sea, all the way around to where he went with a boat and they find Him. And he still has compassion on

8-18-2019 Jesus Walks on the Water

© T. Hardenbrook

them. He pushes even further in his love, through his human weakness, and he teaches them. And he teaches them all afternoon and it's dinner time and we know the story then. They didn't bring any lunch and he provided supper for them, miraculously. So in his humanity, Christ has already been tired. He's already seeking rest. He works one of the greatest miracles anyways, because the people have called upon Him. This is our God, by the way. So if you're not willing to bug him, you're making a mistake.

He feeds them miraculously, and then what does he do? He wants to still get some rest. He was not rested in the work, even the miraculous work that he did. Imagine that for a moment. In his divinity, without a limit to his power and ability and will. In his humanity, just as fragile as we are, he knows us. That is how he is so compassionate. And so he goes by himself. This time, he even tells the disciples, "Get in the boat and get out of here. I'm really tired now." He doesn't complain like I would have, but he's still very tired. And he sends everyone away. And he goes and he rests. And in his humanity, once his humanity is rested enough to continue on his ministry in the providence of God, the timing comes where now he is rested and where should he be? He should be in the boat with his disciples, and he's not.

And then his divinity takes over and he goes to the boat, not by his human power or through his human rest and recovery, but in his divinity he goes to the boat, walking on the water. So we're seeing this incredible realization of the fullness of the humanity of Christ and the revelation of his divinity. He can do anything that he wants. He has just turned two fish and five loaves, five loaves and two fish, into a multitude of food for a multitude of people. And now he comes walking on the water, although in his humanity he has had to insist on resting. And we know the story. As he approaches the boat, everybody is scared. I love that they say they think it was a ghost. Right? Even back then. They didn't have zombies yet, but they had ghosts.

He's a ghost walking on the water and the Son of God, in his divinity, is controlling the creation that he made at the will of the Father. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he is commanding the water. It is supporting him. He is walking to the boat. The bad weather doesn't bother him at all. It doesn't affect him. It's subject to him and even from outside the boat, he has to say to them, "It's just me. It's me. Don't be afraid. I'm not a ghost. It's just me."

And something incredibly happens, still with our mind, on the Transfiguration is for our salvation. Something amazing happens. Fortunately, Peter is there. Peter teaches us things through his folly, really, his zeal without knowledge that we would never have learned if it wasn't for him. We thank God for him. And he has that boldness. You know, that wild personality where he was probably in the boat yelling, "It's a ghost. It's a ghost," right? "Everybody get ready to die!" And then Jesus says, "No, it's me." And he recognizes that it really is Jesus and instantaneously, what's his response? "If it's you, let me come walking on the water as well. Let me do it if it's really you." He has this incredible boldness. And Jesus says to him, "Come, come."

So the God man, the Theanthropos, is walking on the water and when a fallen, impulsive human being asked to be like him, "Let me be like you. Let me be like the God man. Let me walk on the

8-18-2019 Jesus Walks on the Water

© T. Hardenbrook

water too." The answer is "Yes. Come. Come and be like me." And Peter actually, stepping out in that moment of faith, being a wonderful fallen human being like us, he both has faith and he has doubt. And in the moment of the boldness of his faith, he gets out of the boat and walks on the water, like our Savior.

And then that doubt comes in, right? He's walking on the water. He is participating in a miracle and suddenly, his human mind takes over and he looks down and he sees that the water is wild and rough. Something very unnatural is happening. Maybe there is a shark below him and he fears. And although for a moment he had the faith to move mountains, as Christ told us was possible, his doubt affects his faith again, and he begins to sink. And we know that Christ saves him and puts him where he belongs, back in the boat. God is able to help us in miraculous ways to have miraculous experiences, but where we belong, and where God is intending to meet us, is in the boat. And the boat is the Church, the Ark. Remember we call this part of the church right here "the nave," from the same word as Navy.

This is the Ark. We are in the boat right now and Christ is intending to meet us here, even though he is capable of meeting us other places. And so all of this has happened with the disciples. They're coming to a place where they're realizing who he really is. For the first time in scripture, in the book of Matthew, when Christ gets back into the boat, having saved Peter from drowning, they get on their knees and they worship him as God. And they say to him, "You are the Son of God," for the first time. And for all of those critics out there, this is the place at which, if he had not been the Son of God, if he had been simply a prophet or a good teacher or just a good moral man, he would have said, "No, I'm not." And he doesn't.

In the humility of God, who is all powerful and divine and yet profoundly humble, when they get on their knees and worship him and call him God, as is appropriate in our relationship with God, he accepts it. He accepts it in humility. He doesn't say, "Yes, you're right, I am God." He allows them to worship him as God because that is the appropriate response to him. So the apostles know now. At least they have had this idea that he is God, he is human, he needs rest, but he's also the divine creator who can walk on the water whenever he wants to.

And so they're with him. They're in the presence of the Savior, but in their mind somewhere, they are still thinking, "He is God and I am his servant. He is God and I am his servant." Christ is going to reject this or at least transform it later when he says, "I no longer call you servants; I call you friends." And the apostles were referred to the prophet Samuel, who said that God would call them sons and daughters, siblings of the Logos, the Christ.

But their relationship at that time is still God and servant. King and slave. And that still has to change. Although Peter has proven that if God allows us, we can be like him because he walked on the water for a little while. They still don't get what the real reality is about God's relationship with man. And that takes us then to Mount Tabor. There's actually going to be another feeding of the 4,000. You know that, right? After the 5,000 in the book of Matthew, it's recorded that Christ feeds 4,000. They have followed him for three days, not just one afternoon.

8-18-2019 Jesus Walks on the Water

© T. Hardenbrook

I think it's great that 5,000 people were willing to follow him for a day, but by the time you get to three days, it's already down to 4,000. But there are some good improvements because when he says again, "Where's the food for these people?" and the disciples again say, "We don't know. We're out in the middle of nowhere. It's a long way from the grocery store," he says, "What food do you have?" And this time they have seven loaves and at least three fish. They brought some more this time. They're learning. It's a slow process, right?

We're in that same boat, but they're learning. And after feeding even the 4,000 ... so after walking on the water, they see even this another great miracle of feeding the people. And then they make their journey to Mount Tabor and this incredible miracle takes place where again, another Theophany. God is revealed to them again in trinity. The Holy Spirit being there in the shining cloud, the radiant cloud, the voice again of the Father speaking about His Son, in whom He is well- pleased and that everyone should listen to. And the Son being there personally, but something different is happening that didn't happen at the Jordan River. God, the Father, speaking. The cloud, as the presence of the Holy Spirit, is shining. Christ is present as the Son and he himself, in his humanity, is radiating light.

This is a unique revelation on the Mount Tabor. Moses and Elijah are with him also. We learn that that no one who is in Christ is dead. All are alive. We have the communion of the saints from this revelation. The idea that the communion of the saints applied to the people in the world that really did love God somehow and there's this invisible church that we all belong to if we're true believers, is an invention, a very recent one. The communion of the saints, the phrase, "The communion of the saints" come from Moses and Elijah appearing with Christ on Mount Tabor, alive and talking with him. They're not even just standing there worshiping or being transfixed or just apparitions. They're having a conversation. I've always wanted to know what that conversation was. Lord, it is good to be here with you, like these apostles have said, but boy, they're not getting it, are they?

And Jesus saying, "No, I know. I am the Son of God. They've recognized that, but I think you guys need to come with me. I need a little backup to get through the thick skulls that I'm working with here." And yet, theologically, in history, and in this revelation, we see the incredible mercy and love and patience of God. Peter once again is getting all crazy and he wants to build an altar to Christ and to Moses and to Elijah. He sees them as equals and he is corrected because they're not equals. One is God. The other are prophets. And he is corrected there, but we learn over time through the teaching of the apostles and the Church and the saints, that what is revealed there is what we are called to ourselves, and it is to be transfigured, to be literally transformed in our lives, to have as a goal, not for the sake of egoism, but as a sake of the manifestation of God in our life, to follow the path that Saint Seraphim followed that resulted in him glowing with the uncreated light of the Mount Tabor.

We are not most likely going to do that ourselves in our life, but the trajectory has to be the same. We have to see that we are called to be following Christ so intensely, with so much just love for him. Real love. Love that transcends devotion. Love that transcends just wanting to make it into a

8-18-2019 Jesus Walks on the Water

© T. Hardenbrook

heaven, but a love that is crazy. A love that is described in scripture as the love that a young man has pursuing a harlot. That's crazy love. We all know that.

And when we give ourselves over to that, we get on the path of salvation and of deification. We get on the same path that the apostles followed, that the saints and martyrs followed, that the great theologians followed, that Saint Seraphim followed. We read about even Saint Paisios of Greece, the new elder Paisios, who was glorified that people would see him walking around in the dark at night and there would be a radiance in front of him, like a flashlight. But every time he showed up at their house in the pitch of darkness and they'd say, "What'd you do with the flashlight you had?" And he'd say, "What flashlight? I don't know you're talking about." He had just enough to see at night.

And we are called to be on the same path and, more importantly, in the same relationship with Christ, our Lord. The Transfiguration was given to us for our salvation, so that we would see in his transfiguration the salvation that is being offered to us, what we are being called to receive as a gift. Just like when Peter said, "Lord, can I come out like you, the God man, on the water and walk?" Christ said, "Yes, come."

When we say to Christ, "Will you allow me to come towards you on the Mount of Transfiguration? Will you allow me to go towards that uncreated light you are shining with, that transfiguration that puts me into communion with the saints, living and dead?", the answer is yes. The answer is yes. So we are given the Transfiguration. Christ is transfigured on the mountain for our salvation, so let's go after it. There is nothing so small, there is no effort spiritually that is so small it will not bring grace into your life. Pick the smallest thing that you know for sure you can do, this week, and do it. Take one step forward on the path towards God. He is just waiting for you. It's us that have to get out of his way. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.