

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. I love how Paul speaks in this passage. "For this reason, I know I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." What a glorious passage of God's love and grace for us. Think of the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love. We can never understand the full depth of it. We never ask enough. We never seek enough. He has more to give than we can possibly imagine. And the wild thing is He loves us and He cares for us.

Now, we have here in the Old Testament God speaking with Noah and declaring His covenant that he will never again destroy this world with a flood. And He set the rainbow in the skies as a sign of the covenant. Now, we have abused that sign, and it means something completely different today, but it does not change the fact that that sign, that rainbow is God's sign to us and reminder to us that He loves us enough that even though he destroyed the world of all the evil, He promises He will never do it again. And through that rainbow, we also remember how He saved us through the eight persons that were on the ark.

Now, I think even today, even with the corruption of the symbol of the rainbow, God looks upon that rainbow and is reminded even though we deserve His condemnation and His punishment for the sins that we have committed in the sins of the world, we deserve to be wiped out. Was the time of Noah any more evil than today's day or any other period in the history of mankind? I really doubt it. I really doubt that it was any worse, and yet He promises by His grace because of His surpassing love for us that He will not destroy it.

Now, imagine what happened, that the God destroyed the earth. He let the waters and controlled the waters to destroy everything in this world but raised up the ark. And then in the gospel lesson, we have Jesus also controlling the wind and the waves. If this is just after he fed the 5,000 men, and He sends His disciples away so that they can prepare for the next place, and He greets everybody and sends everybody off with a blessing, all the 5,000 men and their families, He dismisses them, and then he goes off to pray by Himself. Because I would imagine He's worn out. That was a lot that He had been doing. And He needed time to be refreshed and restored, and so He went to be with His God, His Father, to commune with His Father and to receive encouragement through the word of God through His presence with His father.

But he sees that the people are struggling on the boat, and He goes out and He does what anybody else would do; he just walks on the water, He just walks on the water. He doesn't intend to stop by them or anything like that, He's just going because he's still wanting to go off by Himself. But they see them, and they're afraid, and so He has compassion on them. Walks over to the boat, gets in the boat and everything of course calms down. But they're terrified because, again, who is this person? Who is this person that, one, can walk on water, and two, when He gets into the boat, everything calms down? And then they get onto land and everybody's bringing their sick. They touch the hem of His cloak and they healed.

But what I find interesting about the gospel is the attitude of the disciples. They were utterly astonished, for they did not understand about the lows but their hearts were hardened. Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear that the hearts are hardened, I think of people who have rebelled against God. I think of the Israelites who worshiped a false God in the wilderness. I think of people who have hatred in their hearts, who have hardened themselves and they don't want to see the love of God and they refuse to admit that they're wrong. That's what I see and initially think of when I think of hardening hearts. They don't want to hear about God. They don't think they need to be forgiven. And yet this hardening of the hearts is describing the disciples. The disciples wanted to hear about God. They were called by God and they followed after Him willingly in faith, trusting that He was a prophet at least, if they didn't understand anything else. And they followed after Him for His entire ministry.

Now, admittedly towards the end, they weren't all that faithful and great. And actually, if you look at the rest of the history of their times with Him, they didn't understand a lot. Most of what Jesus said, they didn't understand. But here it says they were hardened, their hearts were hardened. I don't think they despised God in His message. I don't think they didn't want to hear about salvation. What does it mean?

As I was wrestling with this this week, I came to a slightly nuanced understanding of what they were trying to talk about here when it talks about the disciples hardening heart. And it also has to do with the people who were there to get healed and the people who received the bread and the fish for the feeding of the 5,000. Their hearts were hardened not because they weren't looking for the Messiah. The people who came to be healed by God, by Jesus Christ, the people who got fed the breads and the fish, the people who were in the boat, the disciples themselves, all of them suspected or at least hoped that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. They thought that God had come, that His Messiah was now here. And they were excited about it.

But their vision was too small. Their vision was focused upon themselves. They did not understand what God was trying to do, they were only interested in how that affected them. The feeding was satisfying to the people. They got to see a miracle. They got to be fed. What an amazing thing that was. "Let's go see more." The people who were healed of their diseases were healed and they felt better, and so they were excited that they were healed. The disciples were interested in being the leaders, and everybody was hoping that the Roman government would be finally cast off.

I think the reason that their hearts were hardened or the description of hardening of hearts is the same for us. It's not that we don't want to hear God's word and we don't want to be saved by God's grace, it's that we're thinking only about ourselves. We're thinking about what God is doing for us, how He is blessing us. And we're focused upon that and we don't see the bigger picture of what God is doing. We love the miraculous and the amazing, but we don't understand what is truly miraculous and amazing. We love that God is working in this world, but we don't see how that is going on. And we seem to be narrow in our focus. We seem to limit God.

Paul himself says, "We cannot ask enough of God." He gives us more than we can possibly ask. And why do we ask for more? Because we don't even think about it. We don't even realize that there is more that God has to offer, that His plan is bigger than what we can conceive of. And we don't bother seeking after it because we're good, and so we relax and we forget that God is still at work and active. And He works through waters. The miracle of sending the flood to wash clean the land and restart afresh is amazing. I can't imagine what that would've been like to be in the ark and just feel the power of the flood.

And let's face it; walking on water is pretty amazing and miraculous. I've never seen anybody do it, but man would I love to. And calming the storm; God works with water in these powerful and majestic ways, and yet those things are not nearly as significant as the miracle that He does with some other water. We tend to think of the grandiose, visible things, and that's what we think when we think of God's might and his majesty.

But God is doing a great thing of bringing us into the family, of giving us a firm foundation, a place where we are secure, where we can experience and comprehend the love of God and where we are filled with the fullness of His grace. And that is in the waters of baptism. The waters of baptism do a more amazing miracle and tremendous miracle than any walking on the water, any causing of a flood, anything else that can be done with water. The greater miracle is right there in the baptismal font because in the baptismal font, the water connected with God's word brings us out of the Kingdom of Satan and makes us a child of God. Water

and God's word does that. We are saved by just a little bit of water connected with the word of God. That is more miraculous and more amazing.

What happened last Sunday when we baptized baby Jane was more powerful and more demonstrative of God's grace and love and majesty and might and power than any flood could possibly demonstrate. And we don't see it. We don't even understand it, and yet it is there for us. And every day, we wash our face, every day we experience and connect with water we are called to remember the great miracle that took place in our own lives to keep that at the forefront of our lives that God has done miraculous things in me and then for me, and now He desires to do them through me because this world is a storm.

Think about the seas and the tumult of the waves and the boat being crashed and rocked here there and everybody's unstable and water's leaking in. That's what this world looks like. And why doesn't God destroy it? Because He promised He would not. Because His greatest desire is to love us, not to punish us. And not just us here who recognizes great mercy, but everybody out there as well. He has no desire for anybody to go down. No one. He wants all to come to the knowledge of God. And we have been filled with that knowledge, we've been filled with His power, we have been filled with His purpose, and we are called to act upon it, trusting that when we are in the storms of our own life, He is there amongst us to calm our storms so that we need not be afraid. He is there to lift us up and to save us. In the waters of baptism, He plants us in the ark of the church, the ark of His family where we are secure.

Now, will we suffer the struggles and trials and tribulations of this world? Yes, we will. But we are not overwhelmed by them, we are not capsized by them, we are not afraid of them because we know that through the waters of our baptism, we are His children. And His power is at work within us, and so we are not overwhelmed by the cares of this world. We are confident that no matter what we face, no matter whether it be persecution or famine or pestilence or war or illnesses or diseases or injuries or aging, becoming frail, any of that, we do not need to be afraid because we know we can ask God to be with us and He is there. He's already there before we even ask because He got more to give. And He continues to give us that through every trial and every tribulation that we face.

And we are called to see the bigger picture, to see how He is active at work in the world around us and to be desirous of participating with that, to walk with Him in his ministry and His mission, that everything that we do in this life, every good work that we do, every thought that we have might be to the glory and honor of God, not just my own satisfaction and wellbeing because He will give more than we can possibly imagine. And it all began with a little bit of water and His word. And that little bit of water and His word will carry you through every trial,

JULY 28, 2024 SERMON

including and through the very last breath that you take because you will be brought home. You will be with the Lord because you are His child. And everybody needs to hear that.

And you have the opportunity to walk with God and be His hands and His feet. You may never walk in water, you probably won't, but you know the one who did. And you know that man who is God also loves you and cares for you and loves the whole world. May you rest in that confidence and may you never be afraid to ask for God to be gracious and merciful to you, to ask that you might understand the depth and the height and the length and the breadth of the love of God. May His grace and His mercy and His peace and the baptismal promise that He has given to you be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.