

"God, and Not God"

Text: Matthew 14:22-33

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our Savior God – the God who has our lives well in hand, every moment of every day. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It's time for another installment of "Silly Warning Labels." Thankfully, manufacturers have not been idle. The first is a warning on a pill bottle that reads: *"May cause drowsiness. Use care when operating a car."* Sounds perfectly reasonable, except that it was on a bottle of dog medication. The label on a wheelbarrow warns consumers: *"Not for highway use."* The new Razor scooter is emblazoned with *"Warning! This product moves when used."* The warning on a package of fireplace logs reads: *"Caution! Fire hazard!"* And finally a perfectly acceptable warning: *"Caution! Has been found to cause cancer in lab mice."* Except that it was on a package of rat poison.

There are four possible explanations as to why manufacturers put such inane caution stickers on their products: 1) They think we're stupid. 2) A certain segment of their clientele *is* that stupid. 3) They have a sense of humor. 4) Their lawyers made them. I suspect it's mostly the last one. When you think about it, a significant number of warnings are designed to protect the one issuing the warning, not the one to whom the warning is issued. Why else would the manufacturer of letter openers affix a *"Safety goggles recommended"* sign to their product? Does anyone ever open letters that rambunctiously? Yet now if someone ever does, the manufacturer is protected. This is true not only of companies trying to prevent lawsuits, it applies also to parents. A significant number of parent-to-children warnings are more for the sake of the parent than they are for the children. Parents just feel much more comfortable and confident if they send their children off with a *"Be careful!"* or *"Drive safely."*

This morning we examine a theme that arguably should not need to be articulated. My prayer is that God would not allow anyone to leave here this morning without a greater appreciation for just how much and how often we need to be reminded that there is but one God, and we're not it.

The text that will guide us in our study is found in the 14th Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew:

^{ESV} **Matthew 14:22-33** *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸ ¶ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

This is God's Word. Far from silly or frivolous, these are the very words of life eternal, and by them we seek to be refreshed, refocused, strengthened, and comforted. That our God would grant us such great gifts this morning through the study his Word, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

I have little doubt that a discussion about who is and who is not God might initially strike you as self-evident. Bear with me. While there is much in this life that is silly or pointless, this most certainly is not.

By way of explanation, we first join the disciples in their storm-tossed boat on the Sea of Galilee at the point where they believe they have just seen a ghost. To be fair to the disciples, the word translated **"ghost"** can also mean *"apparition."* In other words, they were frightened by something that they saw but could not explain. Imagine yourself in their position. It is very dark, you are in the middle of a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee, and suddenly you see... what? A silhouette, a human form, something moving across the water toward your imperiled boat. I'm pretty sure that you and I would have also found that more than just a little disconcerting.

But set that aside for now and ask yourself what, exactly, do you suppose had been occupying the thoughts of the disciples just before Jesus arrived. One would assume prayers for deliverance would certainly be playing the lead role. I can't imagine that these *men of God* would not have been passionately petitioning God in their hour of obvious need. How could they *not* have been thinking specifically about Jesus at a time like that – the same Jesus who had only hours before offered a demonstration of his power by his miraculous feeding of the five thousand? My guess is that they were, one and all, yearning for the comforting, powerful presence of their Lord. And yet they are shocked and terrified when Jesus actually arrived on the scene – albeit in rather unconventional fashion.

This leads us to the first question raised by our text: *What are you actually asking for when you pray for deliverance from your God in the hour of peril or extreme need? Are you really asking for God's help, or are you just making yourself feel a bit better about your own chances – your own abilities to weather the storm by invoking the Lord?* Interesting question. Telling question - especially if we ever find ourselves *surprised* by God's divine rescue. I'm sure you have heard more than one person express both joy and surprise that *"My prayers actually worked!"*

I am not God. You are not God. Yet more times than we care to admit we find that we trust more in ourselves for solutions than we trust in God's divine rescue. Maybe the reminder that there is but one God (and I'm not it) isn't so pointless after all.

The next striking aspect of our text is, of course, the fact that Peter had such trust in his Lord that he too was able to walk on water. It is grossly unfair that so many ignore the fact that Peter had the faith to walk on water, but are quick to condemn him for his demonstration of doubt. Who here has ever demonstrated such faith and trust? Note that Peter would not attempt such a thing unless and until he was told by his Savior to do so. This is evidence of Peter's absolute trust in his Lord. The clear message is that Peter fully believed that the command of his Lord carried with it the power to carry out that command.

So what went wrong with Peter? He looked at the threat, rather than at the Deliverer. He lost focus, fixing his attention on the power of the wind and waves rather than on the power and ability of his Savior. He lost sight of "God, and not God" and the inevitable result was failure. He didn't doubt his Lord, he began to fail when he assumed the wrong role. We have evidence that this was the case given the fact that, when sinking, Peter called out *to his Lord* for rescue: **"Lord, save me!"** The

power was always God's, not Peter's. Once Peter refocused, you heard the final result: ***"Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and took hold of him."***

We would give Peter fairly high marks in all of this. Not only did his faith allow him to do something that we would never even attempt, he also demonstrated a perfect trust in his Lord as the only reliable source of rescue when things started to go wrong. Yet Jesus didn't exactly give him high marks, did he? In fact he called him a *"Little Faith"* (one Greek word – oligopiste – a title Jesus curiously reserved only for his disciples). Where does that leave you and me? Again, I could never imagine myself having the strength of faith to walk on water, yet Peter did. And still Jesus labeled his faith as small, and chastised him for doubting. Makes me wonder just what Jesus would say to me, today, here and now. If Peter was a *"Little Faith,"* what does that make me? I suspect everyone here would find themselves in the same boat.

What all of this teaches us, once again, is how great is the gap between us and our God – and therefore just how foolish for any human being to think or pretend otherwise. It teaches us not only how far we are from the faith-filled Christian that we are supposed to be, but just how far above and beyond us is our Savior-God. Jesus *never* doubted, *never* lost faith or confidence, *never* slipped up or fell. It makes us appreciate all the more just how incredibly difficult our rescue really was. Time after time the mountainous waves of despair rose up to threaten Jesus, but he never wavered. How many times did the dread of what lay ahead seek to intimidate Jesus into apprehension or hopelessness or compromise? Yet not once did he allow it to overwhelm him. Never once did his faith or trust in his Father waver.

Had he done so, you and I would have been lost eternally. Had he slipped up, just once, all would have been lost, all would have been condemned. The sum total of all of the cunning and fury of hell charged maniacally again and again and again into this man, only to be defeated every single time. It was that perfect, flawless record that Jesus offered to God the Father as the only adequate payment for our sins. God the Father accepted it for one reason and one reason only: it was absolutely perfect in every way. No flaws, no failures, no deficiencies. Perfection was the only thing that could earn our pardon.

This represents the greatest reason we need to be reminded to let God alone be God: *we could never have paid the bill for our sins. We could never produce anything perfect enough to offer as a sin payment to a holy and just God. Sinners have no such currency, no such bargaining power. We know that we are not God if for no other reason than that it took God to produce what we could not – the payment great enough to pay for my sin, and thereby save me.*

There are many other areas of life where we also need to be reminded to stay in our lane and to let God be God. We fail in this not only when we imagine that we have more power and ability than we do, we fail whenever we try to manipulate or bargain with God ("*I will do this, Lord, if you will do that.*") We fail when we lie awake into the wee hours of the night, filled with anxiety about one thing or another – especially those things over which we have absolutely no control. When you are fretting about the safety of your beloved children or grandchildren, remind yourself of "*God, and not God.*" You cannot preserve your loved ones by worry and anxiety, but God can. And more than that, God *does*. Carry the matter to God and let him be who and what he is. When financial needs seem overwhelming, who then is God? The same as always. Trust the one who is God to keep his promise to supply what you need *when you seek first his kingdom*. Marriage and other relationship issues? Child rearing? Business challenges? The threat of sickness? Carry all to the only One who has power over wind and waves.

Nor should you limit your trust to secular things. You cannot supply the power to overcome sin in your life, but God can. Reach out like Peter and cry, simply, "**Lord, save me!**"

God surely *does* expect us to work hard and to enjoy the labors of our own hands. Yet the temptation is always there to forget who really provides all that we have, who it is that maintains our health, who protects and defends us every moment of our lives until he decides to call us home, and who it is that has rescued us from the unspeakably horrible misery of hell.

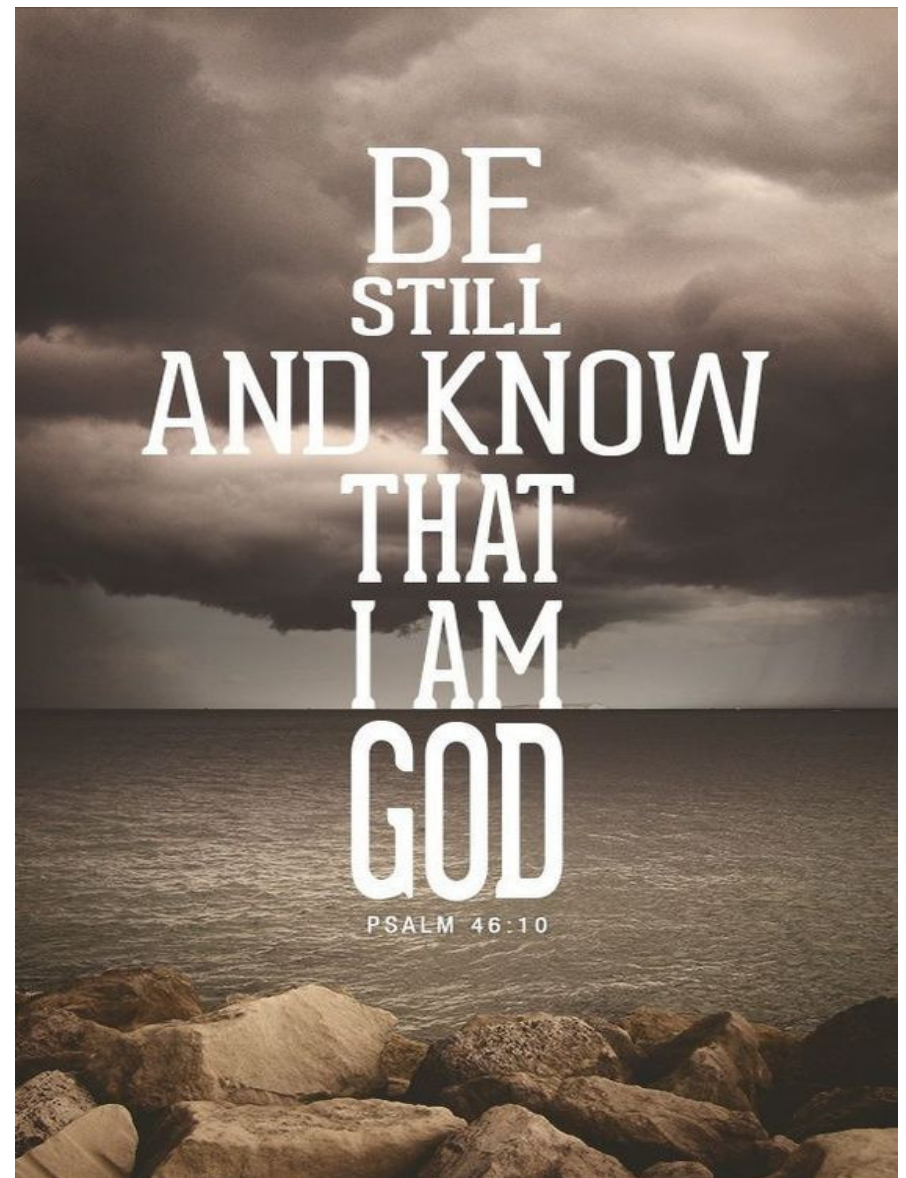
What a tremendous comfort this is intended to be. How foolish *not* to take full advantage of this truth. Not only *can't* you take responsibility for those things that God alone controls, God makes it clear that he is well-pleased when his children obey his command to "***be still, and know that he is God.***" When the storm clouds of your life gather and threaten – as they surely will in a world as sinful and perverse as ours – then look up and remember "*God, and not God.*" Acknowledge the powerful, capable, glorious presence of your God. Hear him speak to you as he

did to the disciples in our text: "***Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.***" The God who sacrificed his own Son will never, could never, let you down. Amen.

ESV **Job 38:4-18** "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ⁸ "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, ⁹ when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'? ¹² "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, ¹³ that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? ¹⁴ It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. ¹⁵ From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken. ¹⁶ "Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? ¹⁷ Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? ¹⁸ Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

ESV **Romans 10:5-13** For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

ESV **Matthew 14:22-33** Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸ ¶ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."



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Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 13, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 767 (Brown Hymnal)

"Church of God, Elect and Glorious"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Job 38:4-18) From time-to-time man needs to be reminded of his place, especially in relation to his God. We find it very easy to fall into an arrogant, silly mindset whereby we imagine that there is some sort of parity or equality between God and man – as though we can bargain with God. Our first lesson disabuses us of any such notion.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 26) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 10:5-13) Our New Testament lesson gives an example of just why it is a good thing for us that our God is not on our level. The solution that God established to rescue fallen mankind was nothing like what man would have devised, for who would have even considered condemning God's only, beloved, innocent Son for the sins of others? Such is God's love for rebellious mankind and his unique and amazing plan for our rescue and salvation.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 250 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy God We Praise Thy Name"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 14:22-33 (Printed on the back page)

"God, and Not God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 392 (Stanzas 1-2 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Best Is the Man, Forever Blest"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (45) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-7:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Samuel Rodebaugh has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor James Albrecht has returned the call to Calvary of Marquette. Missionary Peter Evensen has returned the call to Resurrection of Corpus Christi.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet tomorrow (Monday) evening at 7:00 pm.

VBS and Church Picnic – Our thanks to those who volunteered their time, treasure, and talent for both our Vacation Bible School and the Annual Church Picnic. Our VBS had 12-17 students each session.

Sunday School Teachers – Our Sunday School is scheduled to resume on September 10 (the Sunday after Labor Day). Please let Pastor Roehl know if you would be willing and able to teach this year.

ILC Opening – The opening service for Immanuel Lutheran High School and College is scheduled for next Sunday, August 20th. We have one student planning to attend this year – Aidan Pfennig. Keep our school, both students and faculty, in your prayers.