

Of Faith and Doubt

Matthew 14:22-33

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 13, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God is the great I Am!

He is the One who is. All other existence would not exist if it were not for him. All of our existence is contingent on His existence. Only He exists in and of Himself. This is what He tells Moses when He tells Moses, "I Am!"

Then the I Am sends Moses into Egypt. The I Am sends Moses to Pharaoh. The I Am puts His words into the mouth of Moses and every time Moses speaks the words of I Am they come to pass. If I Am tells Moses to tell Pharaoh that frogs will come on Egypt, frogs come on Egypt. If I Am tells Moses to tell Pharaoh that flies will come on Egypt, flies come on Egypt. If I Am tells Pharaoh that there will be boils or locusts or plague in Egypt, they happen. Even if I Am tells Pharaoh something remarkable like the Nile will turn to blood or there will be darkness in the land of Egypt for three days and three nights, it all comes to pass. Thus it was not Moses who brought Israel out of Egypt and led them in the wilderness. It was I Am. It was not Moses who parted the Sea of Reeds and led the people of Israel across on dry land while the Egyptians were drowned in the waters. It was I Am. It was not Moses who provided for them in the wilderness so that they would not starve. It was not Moses who caused their clothing not to wear out. It was all I Am. I Am did it all. It was not Moses who gave them the land promised to their forefathers. It was I Am who did that.

Since only I Am is the ground of the reality of existence, only I Am could manipulate that reality in order to bring about the miracles that Moses and the Israel witnessed. He brought about those miracles on their behalf to fulfill His Word and to bless and benefit them.

I Am became flesh. The apostles beheld His glory. I Am is Jesus from Nazareth. I Am can still manipulate the creation that He created toward the keeping of His Word and the benefit of His people. So it is no surprise that I Am walks on water. He created the water. He parted it in the Old Testament. Walking on it should be no trouble. The apostles should have immediately recognized I Am as soon as they saw Him on the water. Didn't the prophets and the psalms say that the Lord, the I Am, made His path upon the sea? Were the apostles asleep when they went to synagogue? Did they sing the psalms mindlessly? Were they not paying attention during the reading of the prophets that when I Am does exactly what the psalms and the prophets say that I Am does they still do not recognize Him. They think that He is a ghost.

I Am is your God. You say that Jesus is God. You are apparently here to sing His praises. Since Jesus is the great I Am who proves that He is the great I Am by walking on the water for who else could walk on the sea except I Am? This is your God.

This is furthermore your confession. You confess that Jesus is God. If ever I emphasize the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be one of you who will remind me that He is God. He is the I Am. He is the God who put His words into the mouth of Moses. He is the God who brought the plagues against Pharaoh, the enemy of His people. He is the one who led His people in the wilderness. He is the One who opened the Sea of Reeds before Israel, but drowned hard hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Sea of Reeds. He is the One who put His words in the mouth of the prophets. He is the One who fed five thousand men plus women and children using only five loaves of bread and two fish. He is the One who did it so magnificently that there were twelve baskets left over in testimony to each apostle as to who it was they were dealing with when they dealt with Him.

He is the I Am and He is your God. He has bidden you to take heart. He has bidden you not to be afraid. You need not fear anything that the world has to throw at you. You need not fear anything that Satan may throw at you. You need not fear any circumstance that may come against you in this life. He is the I Am. He has taken care of death and He has proven His favor to you.

First of all, I Am has demonstrated His favor to you by dying for you. The great I Am who is the source of all existence and the source of all life, Himself dies for you. He does this to take away your sin as your confession also states. He does this to atone for your sins and restore you to His own divine favor. He would not have done this for you if He did not love you. He would not have forgiven you, if He wanted to continue to hold a grudge against you. He would not have bothered to have shown you any favor at all if He wanted to. He certainly was not obliged to die for you. He certainly was not required to give His life for you or forgive you. He has chosen to do all of these things freely because He loves you. He has authority to lay down His life. He has authority to take up His life. No one takes His life from Him. Therefore the great I Am has shown to you His divine favor through His death upon the cross. He favors you. He loves you. He cares for you.

Secondly the I Am demonstrates His power over all of the circumstances of your life by defeating death. After all what is the worst that could happen to you? Only death. Death is the worst thing that can happen to you. Death is where the disruption of the creation reaches its final and worst state. Death makes us totally unusable to anybody. We are useful to no one when we are dead. That is why the psalmist cries out to the great I Am and points out, "Who praises You when He is in the grave?" Then I submit to you by the power of the resurrection of the great I Am from the dead that even your death will not get the best of you. He rose from the dead. By rising from the dead He proved that there is life after death. By rising from the dead, He conquered death. He is the great I Am. He can conquer anything. He has conquered it by His own death which atones for the cause of death and by His resurrection which disrupts death and turns it backwards. The great I Am has promised that because He lives you shall live also. Because death is defeated it has not only lost its hold on Him, it has lost its hold on you as well. You shall not die, but live and declare the praises of the great I Am.

And if the great I Am favors you and if the great I Am is the eternal existence that underlies all other existence and holds it up without whom nothing would exist, then He will take care of you. There is no cause for you to doubt your future and your well being.

But you do.

The doubt comes out.

It comes out in your anxiety. Think of all of the things that cause you anxiety. Anxiety comes from believing that whatever it is that is causing you anxiety will take away some necessity of life from you. It is even worse when the thing that causes you anxiety does not threaten to take away some necessity from you, but only threatens to take away something that you desire. In such a case anxiety not only reveals your doubts and lack of faith, it also reveals your lack of proper priority. You are breaking the First Commandment not only because you do not trust in the great I Am above all things, but you are also breaking it because you do not even consider Him to something in which you should trust in the first place.

It comes out in your anger. Anger is sometimes a just expression of God's righteous anger. But anger is all too often an expression of our anxiety. The things that cause us to be anxious threaten us. They threaten us by depriving us of the things that we want. They threaten us by threatening to deprive us of the things that we need. When we lack faith that the great I Am will care for us we become angry at the things that we believe are causing us the anxiety. Rather than to confess our own faithlessness and sin we

lash out at something that we think is part of the problem. Or we lash at something or someone close at hand whether they have anything to do with our anxiety or not.

As an example for myself I cannot count the number of times that I have lashed out at my wife or at a situation or at God because I was anxious about a perceived lack of money. I thought we had overspent. I thought that we had mismanaged our money. I thought that we had not saved enough. And yet here I am standing in front of you in your pulpit. Do I look thin or emaciated to you? I have never been homeless. I have never been without transportation. I have never been without food and drink. In fact often times I have thrown food and drink away because I had too much. And still I have nerve and gall to doubt the great I Am.

When someone doubts us, they have every reason to doubt us. We are untrustworthy. We make promises that we do not intend to keep or cannot keep. Furthermore we are limited and mortal. There are some things that we cannot do. We are unreliable. So if I have just met someone and he or she does not trust me, I take no offense. I understand why they wouldn't. I don't trust people that I have just met either. I need some kind of track record with the person before I put my faith in them.

The great I Am does not make promises that He cannot keep. He can keep all of them. He is the great I Am. The great I Am favors us. He has forgiven us of all of our sins by His death. There is no reason why He would not use His divine power in our favor and yet we doubt Him. We doubt whether or not He is taking care of us. We doubt whether or not He favors us. We doubt whether or not He can do. We doubt whether or not He even exists or whether or not those miracles attributed to Him even happened. We just don't believe it.

We have little faith.

And if it is not ourselves that we are anxious about, it is our children as if the great I Am could not care for them either.

And the things that come against us are just wind. They have no substance. They cannot bring about anything worse than death and our death is cared for. They cannot do anything to us. Everything for which I have been anxious has passed me by without any permanent harm and the I Am promises that death will pass me by without harm either. It is all just air.

So what choice do we of little faith have except to turn to the one who walks on the water? Who else will help us in our weak faith? Who else will help us when we are drowning in our own anxiety and anger? Who else will help us when those things which are just air and have no substance of their own frighten us away from the One who underlies all substance? Who else do we call out to except the Lord.

"Save us!"

And when you do, you may expect a rebuke from Him. He is not going to cover up the fact that you have little faith. He is not going to tell you that your little faith is acceptable to Him or that He wants you to continue in little faith.

He will want to know why you doubted. He will want to expose your idols. He will want you to know that you are trusting in something other than Him to save you or you wouldn't have been anxious about the wind anyway. He will want you to know that behind it all you were really trusting in yourself, hoping that you could solve the problem yourself, wanting to take credit for walking on water yourself, worshipping yourself because you were looking to yourself for all good things and seeking praise for it. He wants you to confess these things. So you are not going to get away without answering His question, "Why did you doubt?"

But He will bring you safely into the boat. He will bring you into a place of safety where not even the wind nor death can harm you. He will bring you to a place of safety where nothing can threaten or

harm you, not your sins, and not even death. He will bring you to the place of safety where you will worship Him.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.