

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**  
**(Year I)**

**The Rev. Warren E. Shaw**

**Lessons:<sup>2</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.<sup>3</sup>

“... Wisdom exalteth her children, and layeth hold of them that seek her. He that loveth her loveth life; and they that seek to her early shall be filled with joy. He that holdeth her fast shall inherit glory; and wheresoever she entereth, the Lord will bless. They that serve her shall minister to the Holy One: and them that love her the Lord doth love. Whoso giveth ear unto her shall judge the nations: and he that attendeth unto her shall dwell securely. If a man commit himself unto her, he shall inherit her; and his generation shall hold her in possession. For at the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul, and try him by her laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and shew [SHOW] him her secrets. But if he go wrong, she will forsake him, and give him over to his own ruin. Observe the opportunity, and beware of evil; and be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul. For there is a shame that bringeth sin; and there is a shame which is glory and grace. Accept no person against thy soul, and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall. And refrain not to speak, when there is occasion to do good, and hide not thy wisdom in her beauty. For by speech wisdom shall be known: and learning by the word of the tongue. In no wise speak against the truth; but be abashed of the error of thine ignorance. Be not ashamed to confess thy sins; and force not the course of the river. Make not thyself an underling to a foolish man; neither accept the person of the mighty. Strive for the truth unto death, and the Lord shall fight for thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.<sup>4</sup>

“When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

“And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Second Lesson for Evening Prayer on the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, 2005, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary.

<sup>2</sup> *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xli (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

<sup>3</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* 4:11-28 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> St. Matthew 14:13-33 (KJV).

ing God,” and, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

Like most people who speak and act without thinking everything through, St. Peter was given to remorse and to second-guessing himself. But the great beauty of following Christ is that you can always be forgiven.

The Lord forgave Peter for every mistake he ever made, and for every sin he ever committed. He forgave him for denying three times that he even knew Jesus. He is ready to forgive you as well. But you have to trust Him.

There is no need to settle for anything less than your highest goals and your noblest aspirations in life, as long as you are trying to be like Christ. Maybe you have good reason not to trust yourself, but you have no reason not to trust the One who died and rose from the dead for you. You don't need to just drift along accepting whatever comes your way. Take some initiative. Pursue an impossible goal. Make a lousy mistake that everyone will notice. Try to do what Jesus does. And if you fail, just ask Him to help you, and He will.

“‘And Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘O man of little faith, why did you doubt?’” Amen.

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Orange, Virginia

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

When I was in junior high school, young musicians from all over the city of Philadelphia came together to rehearse and eventually to perform under the baton of Dr. George Spangler, the director of music for the School District of Philadelphia. I was privileged to be part of that group.

We played music that was somewhat challenging for us at the junior high school level, and from time to time when someone was not sure about an entrance, he would approach the note rather timidly. Dr. Spangler would then stop and tell us not to be afraid of making a mistake. “If you're going to make a mistake,” he would say, “make a good solid one that everybody can hear. Mistakes can be corrected when they are out in the open. I'll help you. That's what I'm here for. But timid mistakes make for timid performances.”

Well, Dr. Spangler would have loved St. Peter. St. Peter was never afraid of making a mistake. He made a lot of them, and the Gospels record some of the major ones so that everyone in the world can read about them. This morning's gospel is an example.

Peter saw his Lord doing a wonderful thing. Jesus was walking over the surface of the water, and Peter decided he wanted to do that, too. The Lord said, “Come”, and Peter came. For a short time he actually did walk on the water, just like his

Master. But then something happened. He allowed himself to be distracted, and He lost his concentration. The wind came up, and the waves came up, and instead of focusing on Jesus, Peter began to focus on them. Immediately, he began to sink. That's what happens when a Christian loses his focus.

Concentration is important to success in almost any endeavor. How many times have you heard an athlete explain that he missed the ball because he lost his concentration just for an instant? How often have you heard a driver explain that he got into an accident because he was distracted? How often have you been counting money, or adding up some figures, or even reading a book, and had to start over again because you lost your concentration?

Practitioners of Karate or of Yoga are able to do some amazing things because they have trained themselves to focus all their physical and mental resources on just one thing and to screen out everything else that is going on around them. So it is with the formation of Christian character. If you want to become like Christ, you have to learn to focus all your resources on Him.

There are many things that distract us from that. Pride was a problem with Peter when Jesus wanted to wash his feet for him. His own agenda got in the way when he tried to prevent Jesus from going to His death. But the problem Peter had most often was one that is familiar to us all. He simply lost his nerve.

Fear is the enemy of faith, and it was lack of faith to which Jesus pointed as the reason for Peter's failure in this instance. He allowed his fear to get the upper hand, and that made him unable to obey when Jesus said "come".

So here is a question for you. What is it that distracts you from focusing on Jesus and causes you to fail in your efforts

obey His commandments? Is it your pride? Is it your own agenda? Or is it simply fear?

You look around at all the forces that threaten you in this world, and you focus on them because they are formidable. They overwhelm you, and you look for ways to protect yourself from them. You seek refuge in family, or in finances, or in booze, or in hedonistic pleasure or just in excessive busyness. You see Jesus out of the corner of your eye, perhaps, but you are not really focusing on him. You are concentrating on the wind and the waves. That is why you cannot do what Jesus does. But Jesus wants all of us to be able to do what He does, even when what He does appears to be miraculous.

So let me try to put to rest two of the most prominent fears that many of us have.

Failure is never fatal for a Christian. Embarrassment is not fatal for a Christian. The only thing that is fatal for a Christian is to persist in focusing on your doubts and your fears.

The moment Peter returned his focus to Christ he asked for help, and he immediately got it. Jesus reached out His hand and caught him and pulled him up. That same outstretched hand will be there for you as well when your courage fails and you lose your focus and you call out, "Lord, save me."

In this instance, Jesus rebukes Peter rather gently for his lack of faith. But I cannot help thinking that Jesus must have been very pleased that Peter had the courage to try. Fear may have caused Peter's downfall, but it was not a fear of failure. One of his most endearing qualities was his brashness. He was never afraid of being wrong or of appearing foolish.

Peter tended to react to situations rather than to think them through, but he had high goals and noble aspirations. He took bold initiatives like trying to walk on water, and he blurted out bold statements like, "You are the Christ, the son of the liv-