

*22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

I step up to the tee. A pond looms on the right side of the fairway. I say to myself, "Don't hit it there." I strike the ball – it flies through the air moving right. Splash!

I look down the alley to see a single pin – the seven – right on the edge of the gutter. Keep it out of that gutter I tell myself. I start my approach – roll the ball down the alley – watch as it moves closer, closer – then tips into the gutter at the last instant.

I won't bring up the mistake she made last week, I tell myself. I'll stay calm. Stay in the present. And I do for a moment and another moment still. Then one word leads to another and my voice is rising and I am dragging last week's failure into today's situation – the very thing I told myself I would not do.

If you don't have any idea what I am talking about this morning I am glad for you. But I suspect that some of you know what it is to do the very things you have set your mind to avoiding. In our recreation the consequences are not very serious. In families and at work I hurt the people I depend upon, the people I love. I tell myself I will try harder next time. But the harder I try not to hit the ball into the water, the more surely I do it.

Like Peter out there on the water, taking step after step toward Jesus. Then noticing the strong wind, becoming frightened, sinking.

I remember how it was those many times I quit smoking cigarettes. For a day or two or five things were manageable. Then I would think – how will I ever write a sermon without a cigarette to sharpen my mind. How

will I ever snap to attention in the morning without that nicotine to clear my head. And then the harder I concentrated on not smoking the greater the pressure built. And I sank.

Fear, anxiety and I sank.

Or the night I was to address the synod assembly a few years ago. I was speaking on behalf of the opposition to the agreement between the Lutherans and the Episcopalians. I was convinced that some fundamental Lutheran principles were being sacrificed in this agreement. In Northeast Ohio mine was a lonely voice but the bishop asked me to speak representing those opposed to the agreement.

I prepared what I wanted to say. I was ready. But I was nervous – worried about my nervousness. The moment came and I who speak in public here most every week began to sink. My mouth went dry, cottony – I don't think anyone heard what I was saying – they only noticed my anxiety.

Peter walks on the water – sees the wind and sinks but Jesus grabs hold of his hand and brings him safely to the boat.

Where will you focus your attention this day? Will your mind return to all of the sinking down beneath the waves? All the golf balls lost – all the resolutions broken – all the failures to love others the way you want to? Then there will be only more sinking down.

Or will you set your mind and your heart and your life on him whose hand grasps hold of you and lifts you up out of the waters?

Jesus wants you to walk with him above the storms of life. But sometimes anxiety on a doctor's face as he tells us the news, or a message that says, "There has been an accident", or the thought, life will have no joy for me if I have to go through every day hungry - sometimes these winds make us afraid and we believe in the waves more than we believe in Jesus, and we sink.

So should you never get out of the boat to walk out on the water with Jesus? Is it better in life to play it safe – to not take the risk Peter did?

I know that when you ask the question Peter did – “Lord, if it is you command me to come to you on the water” – I know that your Lord will always invite you – “Come.” And when you accept that invitation you will do what you never dreamed you could. You will frolic with Jesus on the waters, even as the wind blows all around, with him you will have joy.

And if you should fall victim to fear – look to him – he will reach out – grasp your hand – bring you safely home. For you are his – in the boat and on the water – in times of faith and in moments of fear – in health and in sickness, in honor and in shame, in life and in death, you are his.