

In the gospel of Matthew, as Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, Satan takes Him to a mountain where He is given a view. Satan offers Him a vision of all of the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. Jesus resists the temptation and commands the old evil foe to depart. Now, later on Matthew's gospel, we again find Jesus on a mountain. This time, though, rather than *Jesus* seeing the grandeur of the kingdoms of the **world**, **we** are given a vision of the grandeur of the kingdom of **God**. Matthew's gospel has moved from a test of Jesus to a **testimony** of who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

So, this morning, let's turn our attention to the heavenly vision of Jesus that Matthew offers us. We'll hear the old story, told once again in order that we might give God thanks that Jesus rescues **us** from times of doubt.

"Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray" (vv 22-23a).

From the mountain, Jesus had a good view of the world. As He stands there, He can't help but remember another time He was on a mountain. He had been taken to that mountain in the wilderness by Satan. Satan had paraded before Him the glories of the world. Satan didn't understand Jesus or His mission. Satan thought that He had come to be a king like all other kings. He thought Jesus would be interested in the riches and the power of the world. Satan couldn't have been further from the truth.

Here, on **this** mountain, Jesus had a good view of the world He had come for. He had come to be with the poor and the suffering. He was dismissing five thousand people. They had come to this deserted place because they'd heard He was going there. They did not come empty-handed. But rather than bearing **gifts**, they brought their **burdens**. They filled His vision with the suffering of the world. A feeble mother who could no longer walk. A child who was born blind. A daughter who was possessed by a demon. A man who'd gone deaf. Carried on cots and led by the hand, suffering people from all over came to Jesus on this mountain.

As He dismissed the crowd, Jesus had a good view of the world. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He had come to heal and teach and feed. But for every five thousand He healed, there were **another** five thousand in need of healing; for every five thousand He fed, there were another **ten** thousand in need of food; for every five thousand He taught, there were another **hundred**

thousand in need of teaching. From this mountain, as He dismissed the people, Jesus had a good view of the world, and so He turns to His Father in prayer.

“But the boat [carrying the disciples] by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea” (vv 24–25).

From the sea, Jesus had a good view of the human heart. As Jesus prays on the mountain, He notices something about His disciples. The boat has gone a distance from the land and is now being pummeled by the wind and the waves. On the mountain, Jesus sees the great distance between Himself and His disciples, and He decides to come out to them in the storm.

Jesus doesn’t choose to appear suddenly before His disciples. He decides to come to them by walking. He walks down the mountain, He walks to the shore, He walks on the water, and He walks into the storm. Jesus has walked all night. When He had been on the mountain, evening was just beginning. Now it is early in the morning. He has walked all night to be with His disciples. But when they see Him, they’re afraid. Afraid that He might be a ghost. To calm their fear, Jesus speaks a word of comfort. “Have courage. It is I. Do not be afraid.” But what He hears in reply comes from the depths of the human heart.

Peter says, “If it is you, Lord, tell me to come to you on the water.” **If** it is you. Not **since** it is you. Not **because** it is you. But **if** it is you. Peter is doubting. After all of the healings and all of the teachings, even after Jesus has walked to them on the water in the middle of the night in the middle of the storm, Peter is doubting. From the sea, Jesus had a good view of the human heart. Weak, fallen, filled with fear. The human heart has cracks that let the devil in.

Jesus remembers that time in the desert. He’s heard words like this before. Peter’s “If it is you, Lord” echoes in His ears. Jesus remembers Satan tempting Him: “**If** you are the Son of God,” Satan said. “**If** you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” “**If** you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” Again and again, Satan expressed an evil denial of Jesus. And now, that doubt and that denial have taken hold in Peter’s heart. From the sea, Jesus had a good view of the human heart, that it is evil from birth.

When Jesus had been faced with the temptation by Satan, He fought back. He resisted Satan. He didn’t take his challenge. Ultimately, Jesus said, “Be gone, Satan!” and Satan had to flee.

But here, with Peter, Jesus does something different. Jesus says to Peter, “Come.” Come to Me on the water. Come to Me in the storm. Come to Me with your heart filled with fear and anxiety and doubt. “Come.” Why? Why does Jesus respond one way to Satan and another way to Peter?

Because at that moment, Jesus had a good view of His mission: He came to save sinners. He didn't come to save Satan but to defeat him. He did come, however, to save sinners. So, when Peter, in fear and doubt, calls out to Jesus with a test, Jesus responds by saying, "Come." When Peter begins to sink and cries out, "Lord, save me," Jesus reaches out His hand and saves him. When one of His disciples betrays Him and another denies Him and all flee from Him, Jesus hangs on the cross and says, "Come." "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Come, because I have died for your sin and defeated your enemy Satan, and I will rise to welcome you into the kingdom of God.

Here, in the middle of the night in the middle of the storm in the middle of the gospel of Matthew, we see the heart of Jesus' mission. He has come to call people to repentance and to bring the forgiveness of sins.

What a blessing it is to hear this story again today. Fear and anxiety have not disappeared from the world. In fact, some would say they have increased.

In his 2024 book [The Anxious Generation](#), Jonathan Haidt, a social scientist, chronicles the rise of mental illness, suicide, and anxiety in the generation raised on cell phones. He calls this *The Great Rewiring*. How strange that a device intended to foster communication can break us down, make us depressed and anxious and lonely to the point of death. Social media ironically brings about a sense of the loss of social connection.

While our culture is undergoing a Great **Rewiring**, our Lord is exercising His Great **Desiring**. He longs to be with His people. In our story, the disciples were not crying out, asking for Jesus to come to them. Instead, Jesus saw them, in trouble, at a distance, and walked an entire night from a mountain to the shore over water and into the storm to come out to them. When faced with human doubt, He responded with a divine invitation. When faced with Peter's drowning, He responded with Peter's salvation.

Jesus has come to care for those who suffer and save those who doubt. Jesus doesn't wait for our prayers before He answers. He sees our suffering and responds with love. So, no matter how distant we feel from God, no matter how much we struggle with doubt, Jesus is alive and at work, coming to be with us in our struggles and deliver us in love. Amen.