**RESPONDING TO THE ATTENTIVE JESUS**

**(Matthew 14:22-29)**

How many of you like to go for a walk on semi-regular basis? I know that Larry walks inside at the mall. Ruth Ann likes to use the walking trail just to the north of us. When I go for a walk, I like to chase a little white ball.

The author, John Ortberg, wrote that the Bible is full of unforgettable walks.

* In the opening pages of the Bible we learn that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day.
* Abraham took a long walk with his son Isaac. He left with a heavy heart because he thought he would be the only one to return, but both came back joyfully because God had provided.
* Moses took the Israelites on a walk through a seabed that had been dried by a strong east wind.
* Joshua and his army walked around the walls of Jericho just as God told them, and they won a great victory just as God said they would.
* Two disciples walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and they were joined by a third man. They returned hastily to Jerusalem and the apostles when they learned that their walking companion and dinner guest was none other than the resurrected Jesus.
* The Apostle Paul took a walk to Antioch that was interrupted, and that interruption changed the entire course of his life.
* Jesus took many walks, but His most famous one was probably His walk to Golgotha when He fell under the weight of the cross He was forced to bear.
* Maybe the second most famous walk Jesus took occurred in the early morning darkness. As He neared the end of His walk, He invited Peter to join Him. What made that walk so famous is where the walk took place. The walk occurred not by the water of Lake Galilee. It took place on the water of Lake Galilee.

Matthew, Mark, and John tell us of Jesus walking on the water. Luke omits the story altogether, and only Matthew tells us about Peter getting out of the boat. We are going to read Matthew’s account. My original intent was to cover Matthew 14:22 through the end of the chapter. I discovered there is too much here. We are going to read through v. 29. Next week, we will continue the message.

When I was in school, I did a pretty good job of paying attention to the teacher. Sure, my thoughts would drift from time to time, but I listened, and because I did and because I did my homework, I did well.

As the years have rolled by, I have noticed that I have a harder time paying attention to what goes on around me. I can get lost in my thoughts, and I fail to hear the conversations and the events that are happening right around me.

As I think about and study the ministry of Jesus, it is clear to me that Jesus was extremely attentive. He watched, and He listened, and He knew what was going on in His presence. As the years have rolled by, nothing has changed regarding His attentiveness because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We serve an attentive Savior.

Today, we are going to use our text to learn how Jesus is attentive to us, and how we are to respond to Him.

1. **JESUS WILL PROTECT YOU WHEN YOU ARE IN DANGER.**

Look at how v. 22 begins. It says specifically that Jesus “made the disciples get into the boat.” I find that interesting. It does say that He *instructed* them or *told* them or even *encouraged* them. No, He *made* them. He *coerced* them. He *forced* them to get into the boat.

Why? I believe the answer is provided in what John tells us happened after Jesus fed the multitude. The people were excited about what Jesus had done. According to John 6:14, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” In the next verse we read, “Perceiving then that they were about to come and to take Him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.”

Do you see what is happening? The people looked upon Jesus as a political figure. They didn’t want the nasty, brutish, immoral Herod to be their King. They wanted Jesus to lead them because He fed them. He cared for them.

Don’t’ you want someone who cares for you to represent you in Washington? Every election year, as the political candidates campaign for our votes, they pledge that they will fight for us. Once they are elected, I don’t know if they do. I know they fight one another, but I’m not convinced they are really fighting for us.

Those folks in the Galilee were convinced that Jesus was on their side; so, they wanted Him to be their King. Jesus knew this was dangerous talk. He knew what they wanted was at odds with His goal. He didn’t want His disciples to get caught up in the misguided fervor of the people.

Things were just getting interesting when Jesus made His disciples leave just like when your parents shuttled you off to bed when visiting family starting talking about things they didn’t want you to hear.

I imagine the disciples protested, “Come on Jesus! Let us stay here with You. We’re old enough!”

Jesus said, “No. Get in the boat. Go on. I’ll catch up with You later. Go on, now!”

And just as Jesus sent them disciples away, v. 22 of our text tells us that Jesus dismissed the crowds.

I’ve watched a lot of westerns. This reminds me of those scenes where the men have been drinking. They get all lathered up and form a lynch mob. They march to the jail to get the prisoner with the intent of stringing him up instead of waiting for a trial. The sheriff steps out on the porch cradling his shot gun. He addresses the mob and talks them down. They disperse and go back home to sleep it off.

In this scene, Jesus is the sheriff. He talks the crowd down and sends them home, but before He does, He protects the disciples from the crazy talk and gets them safely away.

Do you think Jesus ever protects you by steering you away from people with whom you don’t need to be talking?

Just yesterday I read about a well-known singer who said things got better when she began to weed out negative people from her life. Do you think it is possible that Jesus wants to weed out people from your life who are having a negative, harmful influence upon you?

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”

Is there someone leading you down a wrong path? If there is, that will not escape the notice of the attentive Jesus. He wants to protect you. So, how should you respond to Him? Like the disciples, you need to say, “Yes, sir,” and then go where He sends you. You need to get in the boat Jesus has assigned to you. You need to row away to the place He has directed and not look back. Obey the Lord.

1. **JESUS WILL COME TO YOU WHEN YOU ARE STRUGGLING.**

Look at vv. 22-23. The Twelve were where they were supposed to be, and they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, but things weren’t going so well for them. They were being buffeted by the wind.

Where was Jesus when this was going on? He was up on the mountain that overlooks the lake, and He was praying. Mark’s gospel tells us, “And He (Jesus) saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.” It does not appear that they were in danger of capsizing and drowning, but they were struggling to get to where they had been sent by Jesus.

So, what did Jesus do. Did He just keep on praying and add them to His prayer list? No. Look at v. 25. Jesus went to them. When you are struggling, Jesus will come to you. He is not going to leave you to fend for yourself.

Notice also they He went to them where they were out on the lake. He didn’t say to Himself, “I told them to go to the other side, and when they get there, then, I will go see them.”

You don’t have to get your act together before Jesus will come to you. Jesus will come to you where you, right where you are struggling.

So, where are you struggling? Is it in a relationship? Is it in your finances? Are you struggling with your health, or your lack of health? Jesus will come to you in the very midst of your difficulty.

So, how are we to respond to the knowledge that Jesus will come to us where we are struggling? Quite simply, we should look for Him.

A week ago, yesterday, I played golf with my brother. On one hole I hit my drive into some really deep rough. The grass was tall. I looked momentarily, but then decided that grass had swallowed that ball, and I wasn’t going to find it. I went back to the cart to get another ball. My brother kept looking for it. Moments later, I heard him say, “Here it is.” Sure enough. There it was.

To change the analogy just a little, you and I are the little ball. Sometimes we get ourselves into some really deep rough. We think, “Jesus is never going to find me here. I’ve been swallowed up by this problem. I’m too far gone.”

Fortunately, Jesus is better at finding lost things that I am. He knows right where we are. He may not come to us immediately or when we expect Him. He may let us struggle awhile. That’s how we develop some spiritual muscle. Just because He doesn’t come right when we want Him to, that doesn’t mean He isn’t going to come at all. Keep looking.

Jesus said in Luke 21:28, “Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” I think we could also say, “Straighten up and raise your heads, because your Redeemer is drawing near.” Keep looking for Him.

1. **JESUS WILL SPEAK TO YOU WHEN YOU ARE FEARFUL.**

We see this in vv. 26-27. We were told in v. 25 that Jesus came to them during the fourth watch of the night. This would have been sometime between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. It would have been dark. Maybe the moon was out enough to cast a bit of glow on the water when they see a figure approaching faster than they are able to row their boat against the wind. They can’t quite make out what they see, but they know it is not a boat.

They just know it can’t be a live person. That idea is preposterous. Live people don’t walk on water. It must be a ghost, not that they have seen a ghost, but what else could it be? And they are terrified.

Jesus didn’t let the stew in their fear. Verse 27 says that Jesus spoke to them “immediately.” They didn’t recognize the figure in the darkness, but they do recognize the voice above the wind. It’s Jesus’ voice, and Jesus has a calming message: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” That is one declarative statement sandwiched between two imperative commands. The disciples are able to take heart, and they are able to not be afraid because of the truth that Jesus has shown up.

We have noted before that the command to not be afraid is the most often given command in Scripture. One source claims it is found 366 times in the Bible prompting one preacher to observe that is one for every day in a leap year.

This weekend has reminded us that we are in hurricane season. Hurricane Dorian has been targeting the coastlines of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas.

We who live in landlocked Oklahoma don’t pay as much attention to hurricanes as do those who live on the east coast or the gulf coast. We do know that all hurricanes have an eye, a place of relative calm around which the strong winds blow. As long as you remain in the eye of the hurricane, you are safe, and the storm won’t hurt you. The danger lies outside the eye of the hurricane.

I have a sermon I have preached several times based on this story. It is based on what Jesus said to the disciples, “It is I.” Jesus is the “I” of the storm, not e-y-e, but simply capital letter “I.” No matter how strong the winds are that you face, when you are with Jesus, you are safe. He is the “I” of your storm; He is the “I” of my storm.

So, what should our response be when Jesus speaks to our fearful hearts? We should listen to Him. Let His familiar voice and His message of assurance minister peace to your heart. You are to look for Him, you are to listen to Him.

Let me tell you the story of Steve Henning from Huntley, Illinois. When Steve was two years old, he contracted spinal meningitis. The year was 1943, and because of World War II, there was a shortage of penicillin. Steve could not receive the treatment he needed. As a result, he lost his hearing.

Even though he lived a full life, for 57 years, Steve could hear neither music, nor laughter, nor the voices of those whom he loved most.

In the winter of 2001, he learned of a surgical procedure that would allow sound waves to bypass the non-functioning part of his ear and travel directly to his auditory nerve. On January 30th he received a cochlear implant. The device, however, could not be activated until the swelling in his ear decreased. He had to wait six weeks to know whether the operation was successful.

On a blustery spring day, he visited the audiologist who programmed the cochlear implant. After doing so, he invited Steve’s wife to say something. Pat Henning leaned toward her husband and gently said, “I love you.” A broad smile came across Steve’s face. For the first time in almost six decades, Steve was able to hear, and the first words he heard were a message of love.

Our physical eyes cannot see Jesus. Our physical sense of touch does not allow us to feel Jesus. With our spiritual ears, however, we can hear the voice of our Shepherd. Maybe even more important that hearing Him say, “I love you,” we need to hear Him say, “I am right here with you.” Hearing such a message will assure us of His love and give us great peace.

Listen, my friend, listen for the voice of Jesus.

1. **JESUS WILL INVITE YOU WHEN YOU ARE TRUSTING.**

Look at v. 28 and the first three words of v. 29. Don’t you just love Peter’s heart? Peter often spoke without thinking. He didn’t carefully weigh his words. He didn’t stew, thinking, “Should I say this or should I not?” He just blurted out whatever came into his head. He didn’t have a filter.

He saw his Master on the water, and he wanted to join Him. Jesus saw Peter’s trust. He rewarded that by inviting Peter to join Him. As the awestruck disciples looked on in utter amazement, Peter climbed over the side of the boat, stood on the water, and began to walk on that water toward Jesus. It is important to note that Peter didn’t get out of the boat until Jesus invited him to do so.

If we rashly jump into something without being invited by our Lord, we will likely get ourselves in trouble.

In his book *If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat,* John Ortberg tells about a man who showed up at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter asked him, “Have you done anything of particular merit?”

The man answered, “Well, I can think of one thing. Once I came upon a gang of high-testosterone bikers who were threatening a young woman. I directed them to leave her alone, but they wouldn’t listen. So, I approached the largest and most heavily tattooed biker. I smacked him on the head, kicked his biker over, ripped out his nose ring and threw it on the ground, and told him, ‘Leave her alone now or you’ll answer to me.’”

St. Peter was more than a little impressed. He asked, “When did this happen?”

The man replied, “A couple of minutes ago.”

There is a difference between faith and foolishness. The difference is that those who are acting on an invitation from Jesus are walking by faith while those who strike out on their own are just being foolish.

Ortberg writes, “The line between ‘Thou shalt not be afraid’ and ‘Thou shalt not be ridiculous’ is often a fine one and not easily located. Knowing when to get out of the boat and take a risk does not only demand courage; it also demands the wisdom to ask the right questions, the discernment to recognize the voice of the Master, and the patience to wait for His command.”

So, what do you do when Jesus invites you to come to Himself? You go to Him. You climb out of your boat of safety and you began doing what not one else thought you could, what you never dared do before, and what you would not do were it not for the fact that Jesus called you. That fact that Jesus called you makes all the difference.

It has been said that God’s commandments are His enablements. When He calls us to do something, He enables us to do what He has called us to do.

One day, Jesus stood before a paralyzed man and said, “Pick up your mat and go home.” When a cruel thing for Jesus to say to a man who lacked the ability to walk! Yet, by saying it, Jesus enabled the man to do it, and he did.

On another occasion, Jesus stood before the entrance to a tomb where his friend Lazarus had been buried four days prior. Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” What an insensitive thing for Jesus to say in the presence of Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, and Lazarus’ friends! How dare he mock the memory of Lazarus by demanding that he come of the tomb! Dead men don’t get up and walk. Yet, that is what Lazarus did because when Jesus calls someone to do the impossible, He enables them to do it.

When Jesus invites you to Himself, He will clear away the obstacles that would otherwise impede you. What obstacles are in your way? Pride? A bad experience in church? A poor upbringing? Theological questions that hinder you? Jesus will pave the way if you take that first step.

We are going to sing the hymn, “Jesus I Come.” As we sing this hymn, you come. Jesus is inviting you to Himself. If you will walk down this aisle and trust Jesus, it will be for you an unforgettable walk.