

Matthew 14: 22-33

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Keep your eye on the ball! Isn't that what they say? If you want to do well in baseball, football, pretty much any sport involving a ball, the most important advice you'll get is to keep your eye on the ball. If you can do that, you might just be able to help your team out, and it's likely that keeping your eye on the ball will help you avoid getting hurt. But it's not just the ball we keep our eye on.

Sometimes, you've got to keep your eye on someone. "I'm keeping my eye on him." We've heard this before too I'm sure. Maybe we don't trust the person, so we're gonna keep our eye on him or her. It doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing though. We might think that someone has great potential, we might think he or she will do well in life, so we want to keep our eye on them. There's plenty of reasons to keep our eye on things.

We're all probably familiar with keeping our eye on something or someone, for various reasons, but other times it's more important than this. Sometimes we need to keep our eyes on something. Not just one, but both. Keep your eyes on the prize! That's sounds important. I mean, it even rhymes! But who doesn't want a prize? If keeping our eyes on the prize is a vital first move in order to succeed, what's it going to hurt if we do that? We want to stay focused on what we're

doing, and what we might get if we do well. It doesn't stop there though. What about this one: Keep your eyes on the road. This is some very sound advice, I can tell you firsthand.

Again, it's something that many of us have heard before, and if any of you have kids that drive it's likely that you've said it. I heard it plenty of times from teachers and my parents, but one night I definitely didn't listen. It was around Thanksgiving so I was home for the weekend from college. I was on my way to a friend's house and it was probably around 10 o'clock or so. Now, this was a drive I had taken probably hundreds of times, so it was a familiar trip. I knew where I was going, there wasn't anything too tricky, I wasn't thinking about it that much. Now, as I mentioned, it was Thanksgiving, which meant my house was pretty full. This of course meant the driveway was full too, so I had to park my car out by the street by the house. When I was on my way to the car, I was walking in the grass, and because it had recently rained, it was pretty muddy. I slipped a little bit, and ended up getting some mud on the side of my shoe. I remember I was driving on the road my friend lived on, which was kind of out in the country. I decided that I would try to wipe that mud off my shoe before I got there, so I started wiping it off on the floor of my car. I turned on my dome light to check my progress, and felt pretty good about it. Sadly, about a second later, I looked up and saw that this

familiar road I was driving on, the one I had been on many, many times before was making a slight curve. I was going about 45 miles per hour, and I ended up going off the road and right into a telephone pole. In the end, the car was totaled, but I wasn't hurt. Of course, none of this would have happened if I had just kept my eyes on the road. And there's similar advice in our text for this morning. If there could be one thing to tell Peter before he ventured out on the water, it would be to stay focused.

Our reading covers the account of Jesus walking on water, but before we get into that, let's look at what led up to this all happening. Jesus had just performed a great miracle, the feeding of the five thousand. In this miracle, our Lord proved to the people there and to us as readers that He knows what we need. Not only does He know what we need, but He is able to provide it for us, free of charge. We know from the story that there wasn't much to work with, but Jesus was able to provide enough food for everyone to be filled, and even have some leftovers! What an amazing and powerful God He is! Of course, after this all happened, the people who were there were amazed. They wanted Him to stay with them. Not only this, but they wanted Him to be their king. Knowing why He came to earth and took human form in the first place, Jesus resists this temptation of the Devil. He goes to a solitary place. He goes to be alone. He sets

this perfect example of how to run from temptation, how to avoid falling into sin. He again sets aside the power and prestige that comes with being the omnipotent God. He does not take the people up on their offer to crown Him as their king. Instead, He goes off alone in prayer. He keeps His focus on why He came here. He is here for something much bigger than some earthly reign.

So while Jesus is off alone, His disciples, having been told to leave, are off in a boat. Now as we read, we see that the boat is a considerable distance from the land, and there are some waves in the water. During the fourth watch, which is another way of saying it was really late at night, Jesus sees where they are and starts walking toward them. For those keeping score at home, you're right, He's walking on water. When we read through this, we see yet another example of how our God, Jesus Christ, has control over this world. Our God created this world, our God has the power to keep it going, and our God rules over it. Jesus Christ, He can walk on water. Many times this illustration is used to denounce someone's power. "Yeah, he's great, but he can't walk on water." Or maybe, "Well, she did everything but walk on water for them." Most people know what this refers to. Most people know this story, whether or not they believe it. And it has a staying power. It's not something we forget easily. Maybe that's because the last time I jumped into a pool I didn't bounce right back out. Nope, I just

ended up under water, like everybody else. We are the created, He is the Creator. He created the water, He has mastery over it.

So we get back to the text, and we have Jesus walking on water. Eventually, His disciples see Him. They're a little scared, and who can blame them? This isn't something you see every day. They were probably still getting over the whole feeding of the five thousand miracle. So they start to freak out, saying it's a ghost, trying to explain the sight that they are seeing. As soon as they do this though, Jesus speaks up. "Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid." With these words, Jesus calms His terrified disciples. With these words, He reassures them that they are safe, and that He is with them. These words are for us too. When we start to feel afraid, if it's something dangerous going on around us, remember these words. If it's just the fears and worries of everyday life, remember these words. Jesus is with us, He promised us that. No matter what is happening around us, He will never leave us. He will never forsake us.

So Jesus' words comfort the disciples. They hear His voice, they recognize Him, and now they're probably trying to figure out what's going on. Why is He walking on water? Why is He coming to them? Well He told them to leave without Him, and so now He's just catching up with them. So once they are able to handle

the situation, Peter speaks up. “Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Bold words. Think he means it? What do you suppose the others thought when Peter said this? Did they question his sanity? Did they think it was just talk? There’s no way he’d actually try that, right? But, before anybody can think about it for too long, Jesus tells him to do it. Peter steps out, things are going well, and then his fears sink in. Or rather, he sinks in. Peter was doing well, he had his eyes on Jesus, but then everything around him scared him. The wind, the waves, maybe the darkness, it was just too much for him. Once he begins to sink, he calls out for help, which Jesus is there to provide. But did you see what happened there? With Jesus, with God, it’s not as trivial as keeping our eye on the ball. It’s not even as simple as keeping our eyes on the road. In this life, with the gift of faith that we have from our God, we need to keep our eyes, our hearts, our minds, everything on Him.

To those who have been saved by God’s loving grace through the waters of Baptism, we will never sink in the deep waters of sin in this world. The sin that makes us doubt our God. The sin that makes us want everything our way. The sin that tries to convince us that we’re beyond salvation. The sin that wants to kill us, and would if it could. We live in a sinful world. It’s a world that we brought upon ourselves. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The fact is, every day,

every hour, we take our eyes off of our God. We look away from our loving Creator, away from our loving Savior. We know what He did for us. We know how He suffered. And yet we fall into sin anyway. Instead of keeping our eyes on the saving work of Jesus Christ, instead of keeping our eyes on the cross on which He died for us, we stare into that darkness of sin. We listen to the temptations of the Devil, and we think that sounds just great. We are blinded by our selfishness, we are blinded by Satan's lies. And in our blindness of sin, it's impossible to keep our eyes on Jesus.

But that's not where it stops. We know that while we do sink into the depths of sin, while we are blinded by the lies of this world and the lies of the Devil, we have the solution. We have that life preserver, and it's big enough for the entire world. While we were sinking to the bottom of the sea of sin, Christ bent down and saved us. He saved us by coming to earth. He saved us by living a life free of sin. He saved us by giving that life up, for a sin soaked people. He saved us by dying on the cross. There was nothing in us worth saving. We were lost, we were chasing after our own pleasures, after what we want. And yet His love for us is so strong, that He willingly took our sins upon Himself, and He suffered in our place. He went to the bottom of that sea, where we belong. He went there, but He didn't stay. On the third day after His brutal death, that stone was rolled away

and death was dead. Death isn't just at the bottom of the sea, it's not just gone for a little bit. It's not damaged but not destroyed. Death is dead. Through Christ's death and resurrection, Satan is defeated. Our sin is forgiven, and death is no more. We have no true fears now, because we have a God that knows what we need, both in this world and the next. Not only do we see this with the feeding of the five thousand, or the saving of Peter as he sunk into the dark water below him. We know that we have a loving God that saved us from our sin. We don't deserve it, we do nothing to earn it, but by His grace we are saved.

So we know that we want to keep our eye, or our eyes on various important things in this world. But how do we keep our eyes on Jesus? What do we do to keep our focus on Him? We go to where he promises to be. We go to the Bible, the Word of God. It is here that we find encouragement. It is here that we find comfort when we are scared of the world around us. It is here that we go when we're feeling the pressures of temptation. Not only this, but we have the gift of the Sacraments. In our Baptism, our sins were washed away, we were given faith and a new life. In Holy Communion, we are given the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the bread and the wine. Through these gifts, we have our God. Our loving, saving God. It is here that we can keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Amen.