

St. Giles' Episcopal Church
June 27, 2010 – Camp St. Giles'
Matthew 14:22-33
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Dorothy L. Sayers is a 20th century author famous for her series of detective stories featuring Lord Peter Wimsey. You may have enjoyed reading these books and watching the dramatizations on PBS, as I have. Great stories and great characters! Sayers also wrote an outstanding translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with extensive commentary. And she wrote a series of twelve plays for radio broadcast called *The Man Born to be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. These plays, based firmly on the gospel accounts, cover the life of Jesus from his birth through his ascension into heaven. Sayers wanted to bring the gospel alive and make it real to people. The radio broadcast over the B.B.C. took place in December, 1941, when every night listeners' homes were in danger of being bombed. The plays were very popular. I recently re-read *The Man Born to be King*, and I recommend it to you because Sayers does succeed in making the gospel stories fresh and vivid. In her fifth play we find this morning's gospel story.

As we just heard, the disciples at first thought that Jesus was a ghost coming towards their boat across the water. In the play, it is John the beloved disciple who is the first to recognize Jesus. Then immediately Simon Peter says, "Is it really you, Lord? Don't go! Wait for me." Jesus says, "Come then, Simon" and Peter walks on the water toward Jesus, his eyes on his Master. Suddenly all the disciples cry, "He's gone under," and Peter calls out, "Help, help! I am drowning. Help, Lord!" Then Jesus, close to Peter, says, "Hold on. I am here. I've got you. Why did you lose faith all of a sudden?" Peter replies, "I was afraid – the wind and the waves – I looked back." Jesus says, "You

were all right till you stopped to think about yourself. Into the boat with you!” And so Peter is rescued. Jesus joins the disciples in the boat and then calms the storm with a command of peace.¹ The last exchange between Peter and Jesus is not in the Bible, but I do think it is true to the characters we encounter in scripture.

We know that Simon Peter loved Jesus deeply. We know that he followed Jesus and learned from Jesus. We know that he made mistakes, too. He was impulsive. He sometimes thought he understood what the mission of Jesus was all about, but got it wrong. We remember Peter’s behavior the night of the Last Supper, when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. When he approached Peter to wash his feet, “Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’” (John 13:8-9). And we remember that though Peter promised Jesus that he would never desert him, while Jesus was on trial, Peter denied Jesus three times, then wept bitterly when he realized what he had done.

We have much to learn from Peter – the rock on whom Jesus founded the Church. His passionate love and devotion to Christ may inspire ours. And Peter – though impulsive and often mistaken – was always willing to be corrected and redirected by Jesus. He was a man of repentance and humility, not perfection. What does Peter do right in this morning’s gospel lesson? He follows Jesus as soon as he recognizes him. And when he begins to sink into the water, he calls out to Jesus for help. Every time Peter went wrong, he turned back to Christ, got up and followed once more.

¹ Sayers, Dorothy L., *The Man Born to be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1943, pages 140-142

What do we learn about Jesus from this morning's gospel lesson? When Peter lost faith and cried out to Jesus for help, Jesus did not refuse to help him, but "immediately reached out his hand and caught him." He rescued Peter, but not without a challenging question – "Why did you doubt?"

When we stumble as we try to follow Jesus and we have the sense to cry out to Jesus for help, I believe that Jesus will help us. My experience teaches me that God's concept of "immediate" assistance and mine are often very different! But help does come, in unlooked for ways and in what we may call "God's time." My experience also teaches me that Jesus is still asking his followers challenging questions, questions that make us take a good look at ourselves and a good look at Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

God's steadfast love can be trusted! May we have the courage to trust God's love more every day, with our eyes on our Good Teacher and our hearts filled with love.

Amen.