

Mark 6:45-56

Pentecost 11; August 4 & 5, 2024

It was hilarious listening to some of the ladies who were serving food at LGP camp. The little ones would come up to the serving tables early in the week. They would be asked *do you want cheese or sausage on your eggs?* Then they would stand there with a smile on their face and nod. *Do you want cheese or sausage on your eggs?* (repeat nod) *which one do you want or do you want both?* Ever felt like one of them though. You walk into a conversation where everyone is laughing and you have no idea what they are laughing about. So, you start to laugh as well. But you just don't seem to get it. You are the supervisor who is trying to teach a new employee, and they just don't seem to get it. You think: *Why don't you get it?*

Maybe that's a little bit how a person might feel like reading a simple story like our text. This is not the story of Jesus sleeping in the boat while the storm rages around them. This is not the story of Jesus asking Peter to come out on the water, walks for a little on the water and then begins to sink. This is a different account about Jesus walking on the water than what we normally hear about. As you read these verses, there are a couple questions that come to mind: 1. *If Jesus is God and knows all things, why does he order the disciples out into what He knows will become a storm?* 2. *If Jesus is God and God is compassionate, then why does he wait so long to do anything to help?* 3. *And if Jesus is about to do something for them – like walking all the way out there on the water – then why does He “mean to pass them by?”*

Let's recall all that has happened in Mark chapter 6. Jesus had sent the disciples out two by two on their first missionary journey. They returned to find out that John the Baptist had been put to death. Jesus set sail with his disciples to spend some time alone teaching them as they sail across the Sea of Galilee. When they go to the other shore, the crowds were waiting for them. Jesus has compassion on them and begins to teach them. When it gets late in the afternoon, he feeds 5,000 men plus women and children. As this day is wrapping up, Mark writes: **⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.** However, their day was not over for them. Jesus was not done teaching them that day.

Mark continues: **“Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.”** They were wrestling to stay alive that night. A couple of years ago, Nancy & I went kayaking by the Picture Rocks in Michigan. From my perspective that day, it was awful. The lake was way too rough for my strength, which made me way too tired and way too crabby. It was not a pretty picture. Unfortunately, I did not hide my frustration and exhaustion. That was just in a two-person kayak, I can't imagine what the night was like for the disciples.

The sails had been dropped a long time ago that night. Their only hope to get the boat off that Lake was to try to use the oars. These 12 strong men were struggling. As you look at these verses of our text, you can't help but think: *Did they forget about all that had happened in Chapter 6?* They had healed diseases and drove out demons. They had heard the words of Jesus. They saw him feed the 5,000. What more do they need to see that Jesus has the power to take care of them, even if he isn't in the boat with them? Did they think: *Why did Jesus send us on this lake?* We don't know, but Mark doesn't record that any of them thought to cry out to Jesus for help.

So, Jesus was going to use the events of that night as a teachable moment. He was going to let them wrestle with the events around them for a while. **“Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.”** Jesus seeing their difficulty, walked on the water toward them. Interestingly, it is Mark that records that **“he was about to pass them by.”** Why would Jesus act as if he was going to go right pass the disciples? Why not just simply walk toward them and make it obvious that he was there to help? Was he trying to give the disciples an opportunity to demonstrate their trust in him. If that was the case, they didn't do very well. Jesus' miraculous presence never occurred to them after witnessing Jesus feed thousands of people with a boy's lunch. As Mark notes, **“they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.”** In other words, are they just not getting it.

Yet, one can't help think about times in the Old Testament that God "passed by" people. In the Old Testament, passing by was a way of divine glory.

God passes by Moses on Mount Sinai – **"⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."** (Exodus 34:6-7).

God passes by Elijah at the mouth of the cave - **¹¹ The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."** (1 Kings 19:11-13)

He passes by because we cannot stand in the full glory of God. Perhaps, Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that when Jesus intended to pass by them, it was a saving passing by. Regardless of Jesus' intent, he still calmed their fears.

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed." Jesus intended for His disciples to see Him, to know Him as more than a healer or a feeder or a teacher. Jesus desired to reveal Himself to His disciples as the Lord of Creation: The One who could walk on the waters of the sea. Because the One who created the world has promised to come and restore it. He has promised to come and bear the punishment for sin, so we no longer fear God's wrath. He has promised to come and defeat the forces of evil so we can live in courageous hope. Jesus is the One who dies to bear sin and rises to bring restoration and He comes to us now in His Word. Not in the middle of the sea, not in the middle of the marketplace, but in the middle of your daily life. God has come through His Word to reveal who Jesus truly is: Your Savior and your Lord. He comes to us in the Words of Scripture. He comes to us in the waters of baptism. He comes to us through the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. He comes to us with his forgiveness. Just as he said to the disciples, he says to us: **"Take courage! It is I! Don't be afraid!"**

God's Word reminds us that the one who provides it all stands by our side. Whether we see it or not like in our first reading or whether other people stand by us or not as in our second reading. Our God is with us always. Maybe we are like that little kid who doesn't know what to say because things are just overwhelming or not. Trust him in all things. Amen.