

July 26, 2015
Mark 6:45-56

Proper 12b
Passing By

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I forget precisely what year it was, but my counselor was Sprocket, and my JC's were Elvis and Worm. We were staying at Raft Village at Camp Luther in Three Lakes, WI. Part of our activities for the week was to do a Canoe Trip to Sam Campbell. Theoretically this canoe adventure should take about 4 hours to get there. We came out of the channel and started to head across Planting Ground Lake. This is a giant lake and we had to go across the lake to get to the next one. The wind was heavy that day. It was beating on the boat. We fought the waves hard. The winds and the waves were against us. At points we thought we were going to be tip, but we never did. Some eight hours later we made it to Sam Campbell. I was never afraid, just growing tired and frustrated.

Perhaps that's what the disciples felt, tired and frustrated on this day as they have been rowing across the lake for hours, a lake that even in the worst of conditions would only take them 4-6 hours to get across. Let's take a moment though to set the stage and see where we are at.

Our text begins immediately after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus sends the disciples away to a boat to cross over to Bethsaida. This really shouldn't be that hard to do, many of the disciples are fisherman. As the disciples leave, Jesus dismisses the crowds. After dismissing the crowds, Jesus goes up on a mountain to pray by himself. He takes some time out of his routine to go and be refreshed by His Father. He's having a conversation with His Father for hours, into the wee hours of the morning. This is when things get interesting in our text. Mark records it this way: "And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them." Jesus miraculously sees them on the lake, being tormented by the winds and the waves.

On the Sea of Galilee there is an easterly storm that comes up, called "Sharkia", it usually starts in early evening and is a good cause of apprehension for even the most seasoned of fisherman. The NIV says that they were straining at the oars. The disciples were being tormented by the winds and the waves. They were struggling to get across the lake. Mark goes on to say: "And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." Jesus is walking on top of the sea. Jesus is walking on the water, and its early morning. The fourth watch is sometime between 4-6 AM.

One can expect Jesus to send the disciples off so He can be by Himself for a while and pray. One can expect Jesus to extraordinary things, like seeing the disciples a long ways off, and seeing their struggles. One could even go so far as to see Jesus walking on the water. After all, He is Lord over Creation. It's the very next words in the Gospel reading that struck me by surprise: "He meant to pass by them..."

Do you ever have a moment when reading a specific biblical story that you see something new, even though you've read the story hundreds of times. This happened here. I paused, wondering what is going on. Why did Jesus mean to pass by them? They are struggling. Does it mean He was going to sneak by them, but got caught? That really doesn't sound like the Lord of the Universe, who we've seen controls the wind and the waves with His voice! Did it mean he was going to beat them to Gennesaret? Why would that need to happen? It doesn't actually mean either of these things. There's way more significance to it, than just some trivial thing. If he was just going to beat them to Gennesaret, he would have just gone.

Let's look at the Old Testament to find the significance of God passing by. When God is going to pass by someone, it often means he is going to reveal himself to someone, he is going to pull back the veil of his glory for a moment and show a glimpse of his power, of His holiness, and give His grace. Moses encounters this on Mt. Sinai: ¹⁸ *Moses said, "Please show me your glory."* ¹⁹ *And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."* ²⁰ *But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* ²¹ *And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,"* ²² *and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.* ²³ *Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."* ¹

You can also see God passing by when you hear about the Tabernacle in the wilderness. God fills the Tabernacle, and then the temple with his Glory, God passes by to show who He really is. That He is really present, really powerful, and really perfect. Really that is what Jesus is doing here! He is meaning to pass by them and let them see that HE is there with them, that He is powerful (He's walking on top of the water), and that he is perfect (holy, and in perfect control of His creation).

It may be surprising to see Jesus show up this way, we really shouldn't be shocked, neither should the disciples. This is only Mark 6, so if we go back these few chapters, we can see what the disciples have already witnessed, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, cleansed a leper, healed a paralyzed man, a man with a withered hand, and woman who was bleed, raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. They were in a boat when He calmed a storm. They've seen and heard Him stump the Pharisees. They've seen Him cast out demons. Earlier in the day, they watched Him feed over 5000 people. Jesus has been doing all kinds of thing that aren't listed in Mark, let alone the other gospels. They've seen Him do many things, so Jesus walking on water, should not shock them.

When they see something extraordinary, they should know that it is JESUS. Really, the disciples should "get it." They should understand who He is, what He does, and be filled with joy when they see Him. And frankly, we should get it too.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ex 33:17–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Our text continues: “but when they saw Him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified.” They weren’t afraid till now. Really who wouldn’t be when they see something walking on the water? Really, these guys should get it, they should know who Jesus is. In just a few verses we’ll understand why, “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”

Jesus responds to His disciples, His friends out of love and compassion. In last week’s Gospel reading we heard how Jesus had compassion on the crowds, this week He shows His compassion for the disciples. He responds to them, immediately saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” When He got into the boat, the wind ceased. Jesus doesn’t tell them to get lost or doesn’t just keep going on His way, continuing His stroll on the water, he just comforts them by telling them again who He is. He even uses the Divine name. “I am” “Yahweh”. He comforts them by coming closer to them, and being with them. That’s what this text is about. It’s also about showing us that He is God, Lord over all creation. This lesson is all about Jesus and who He is. This whole chapter has really been about His love for people, even as hard-hearted and sinful they are.

The words Jesus says, can be of great comfort to you as God’s people today, “Take heart, It is I, do not be afraid.” We too need to be reminded of who Jesus is and what He does for us all the time. We need to be reminded on a daily basis of this great love Jesus has for us. Sometimes we don’t get it either.

This text isn’t about God calming storms in our life through miraculous means. It’s about God being in the midst of our lives and keeping us calm through storms. It’s about calming our fears, maybe not the storm in our lives. We can look at our lives and we can see the very things that are tormenting us.

Many things torment us, whether they be outside forces that invade our lives, such as sickness and disease, or other medical issue. Perhaps we are afraid at what is going on in our world, perhaps it causes us to worry about our kids and how they will grow up in this world (and it doesn’t matter how old or young they are). There are those sins that constantly pile up on a daily basis. Perhaps it’s a habitual sin that you are struggling with, where the waves of sin keep coming into your boat. And sometimes when things seem to be out of control, we try and take the oars and row out of the storm, when all we need to do is ask for comfort and peace with Jesus. Jesus doesn’t come to us in our troubles and scolds us, He comes to you in compassion and peace, like we heard last week, he comes to you as your shepherd.

This is Jesus, your Good Shepherd, your comforter, your guide, your protector, and more importantly your Savior. This Jesus is the God of the Universe, He is the Word that by being spoken, creation came to be. This Jesus is the God who can comfort and calm physical storms with his mere presence. This Jesus is the God who has compassion on those that are lost and just don’t get it. This Jesus is your Savior from Sin. This Jesus constantly shows you his power, his presence, and his perfect.

Ultimately, this Jesus showed you all this on the cross and the empty tomb. He showed you His presence in our life as the crucified Savior and victorious Lord. He showed you His power when He conquered death, won the victory, and walked out of the tomb alive. He showed you His perfection by being the one to take your sin and mine upon Himself, and giving His perfection in sin's place. He gave Himself for you, so that you can live. He gave Himself to you, so that you can have comfort, peace, and joy, even when the waves of life threaten you. He gave Himself for you so that the torrential waves of sin that wreak havoc on your life can be forgiven. He gave Himself to you so that you have the promise of life in the new creation.

You might be tormented by sin, death, and the devil. You might be tormented by sickness, disease, and injury. You might even be trying to cross the mighty waves of life on your own. Know this, Jesus is your Savior from it all. He conquered everything. He even has the power over His creation. Yes, sometimes, the pains and trials will remain, but know that God will calm your heart, He is still and always will be your Shepherd, the One who has compassion on and for you.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.