

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 6:45–56

Sermon: “Take Heart, No Fear”

In this season after Pentecost, the stories of Jesus in the *Gospels* highlight the various ways that our Lord meets the trials and tribulations of his people. At the same time, he is always looking ahead to the cross, where he meets our deepest needs of forgiveness and salvation.

Today, we are confronted by one of the common themes in biblical assurance, that with the Lord there is no need to fear. Even as we are daily confronted with things that cause us to be afraid, that give us heartache and pain, that bring about sorrow and mourning, our Lord comes to us amid the chaos to calm our fears and give us hope.

As we read through the stories of Scripture in these days after Pentecost, there are certain moments when we would like to give the disciples a hard time. Today’s Gospel is just such an occasion.

We were not with the disciples as they journeyed with Jesus, so it is hard for us to know what they were truly going through as they heard the things Jesus said and saw the things Jesus did.

What is recorded for us in Holy Writ, however, seems to be many of the teachable moments, and most of them are not all that flattering.

Our critique of the disciples in today's account centers on how they did not know it was Jesus who was walking to them on the water. They seem to have a short-term memory problem, for it was just a few weeks ago when, in Mark 4, we heard that Jesus was sleeping soundly on a cushion in a boat as a great storm arose. How could they have forgotten so quickly about that event?

And today, as Jesus climbs into the boat with them, it says that the disciples were utterly astounded because they had forgotten what happened in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Why in the world were the disciples fearful, thinking Jesus was a ghost? What was hard about all of this?

Well, like most situations, hindsight is 20/20. We think things should be obvious to the disciples because we already know how everything ends. The disciples were in the middle of things and could only go by what they thought they knew and what they were seeing . . . and they did not get it. They will eventually. So, let us put ourselves in their shoes for just a minute.

Or better yet, take a look at ourselves for our response to similar life

situations is often no different from these disciples: we sometimes fail to see clearly or understand fully.

The Gospel today shows us the strains and pains God's people were experiencing, both the disciples and the crowds on Gennesaret's shore. As the disciples were on the sea, the text says, they were making headway painfully, straining against the heavy winds. Make no mistake about it: this was not just a tough sail for them; this was hard work. It was late, they were tired, and there was a real fear on their part that they might not make it across safely. These disciples are getting nowhere fast, and it is a strain to make any headway at all.

With Jesus' help, the disciples land on the other side of the sea, where Jesus encounters the second group of people today. Our Lord's fame had spread throughout the region, so when people recognized him, they brought to him their sick and lame. All of them who felt the pains of life were healed by Jesus, even if all they were able to do was grab hold of the fringe of his garment. For the disciples and for the people, there was only one thing that could help as they experienced the strains and pains of this mortal life: the presence of

Jesus.

It is the presence of Jesus that helps us still as we go through the strains and pains brought about as the effects of sin. If we look at our lives as a whole, most of us would probably agree that we are truly blessed by God. We have family and friends to share our lives; we are blessed with jobs and opportunities to use our gifts in service to our neighbor; we have a place to live and food to eat and many other blessings from our Creator. We can even get to a point in life where it feels as if we are riding the wave comfortably and can simply enjoy all that God provides.

However, there are moments where the wind picks up: we get in a fight with someone we love, our job becomes a dreadful burden or is taken from us, the joys of homeownership overwhelm us, or our very lives seem to be in jeopardy. Like the disciples, we find that the days become long, and we are tired we are lonely. We are making headway in life painfully.

As people of God, our faith knows where we can turn for help in these times, but as sinful people, we often do not do it. We tell ourselves that painful headway is still headway, that we can do it ourselves, and even if Jesus factors

into things, we often see him as the disciples did: like a ghost and not really there. In fact, we do this so often that we begin to think this is just how things are in life.

When life becomes work, when hardship befalls us, when suffering enters our world, we have a tendency to close up, to isolate ourselves, and to desire simply to be alone in the strains and pains of our misery. As people of faith, we ought to know this is not the way things are intended to be for us, that we are never alone, that we know where we can turn to find divine help, and yet so many times our life looks quite different.

An outsider looking at our life might sometimes think, “How can you not get it? How can you not see where your help is? Why have you not learned by now that Jesus is always with you?”

But it was the presence of Jesus that brought calm amid wind and waves. It was the presence of Jesus that brought healing to the sick and infirm. It is the presence of Jesus that comforts us and joins us to his help and healing and life through forgiveness and grace.

From the moment of our Baptism, the Lord’s promise is that he will never

leave us or forsake us. He continues to make his presence known as we receive his forgiving word of absolution, as we are reminded of his promises revealed in his Holy Word, and as we have his very life placed into our mouths in the Lord's Supper. His presence is manifest to us as a recipient of his daily provision and is shared as we bring works of mercy to others. In all times and in every circumstance, Jesus is there: ***"I am with you always, to the end of the age"*** (Matthew 28:20).

In fact, Jesus is not just present with us but has borne the burden of the strain and pain of our sin. He knows the heartache and hurt that we experience. He has died for us on the cross and has risen from the grave to give us the eternal gains of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). These are powerfully comforting words from our Savior today, for the strains and pains of life are sure to come, but as a child of God, we know where we can turn for help in our time of need.

Look to Jesus, for he is there. He steps into the boat with us to bring an end

to our strains; he brings his healing touch to us for all our pains of body and soul; he has gained for us the kingdom and promises us life with him eternally. Just as He promised, Jesus is always with us, especially in our strains and pains, to secure for us eternal gains.

Your health and life are forever preserved by the presence of Jesus, so whatever may come for you, you can confidently pray to the Lord the words of hymn 754:

Our hands and feet, Lord, strengthen; With joy our spirits bless

Until we see the ending, Of all our life's distress.

And so throughout our lifetime, Keep us within Your care

And at our end then bring us, To heav'n to praise You there. (*LSB 754:6*)

Amen