

July 25, 2021  
Ninth Sunday After Pentecost  
Mark 6:45-56

Perhaps this very day you are in one of those situations where, as a believer in Christ, you're asking Him, "Why am I here in this awful predicament in life that is causing me so much fear?" The thinking behind this question is that something must be wrong. Jesus would never willingly allow such a situation to happen...and He most certainly wouldn't be the cause. And He most certainly wouldn't allow us to wallow around in such uncertainty and fear.

Wrong, sure he would.

*"Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side."* Jesus is the one that sets this whole episode up. The fact is that this boat trip should be a cake walk for the disciples. This trip from the east side of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus fed the 5000 to Bethsaida just up the coast is really just crossing the bay at the northern end of this rather small body of water. But Jesus, who has divine authority over all creation, sends them into a situation where everything turns against them.

So when evening comes the text says they were "out on the sea" probably meaning way off course and the wind was against them and they were struggling. Just to be clear, there is no indication that the disciples think they're going to die like that time Jesus is asleep in the boat. However, also bear in mind that the sea is a source of great fear and considered a place of evil and death in the Jewish mindset. So they're on the sea struggling and getting nowhere. And note that this all starts when evening comes and they're out there all night long. It's not until the last watch of the night, possibly at dawn, that Jesus makes a move!

And then Jesus finally comes, walking on the water and the text says, *"He meant to pass by them."* This seems really bizarre, but it also may clue us into what Jesus is up to. Jesus is fully

God and this isn't the first time Yahweh passes by somebody. He passed before Moses. He passed by Elijah. Both those times Yahweh was revealing Himself for the strengthening of faith. And ancient Job, a couple verses after describing Yahweh having "*trampled the waves of the sea*" says, "*Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.*" So I don't think it's much of a stretch to see the purpose Jesus has here. He shows pretty strongly that where the disciples in their humanity struggle and are powerless, Jesus in His humanity wields the very divine power of Yahweh. Jesus is revealing that He is the Lord and He is in control.

The disciples see, but don't perceive. First they see Jesus as a ghost or something and scream in terror. **Now** they likely think they're going to die. But Christ continues to reveal Himself, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*" And then Jesus, Yahweh, gets into the boat with them and the wind just stops.

Jesus has revealed Himself pretty clearly as Yahweh by controlling nature, trampling the sea underfoot in walking on water, in defying the laws of physics in the feeding of the 5000 and yet they do not understand for "*their hearts were hardened.*"

But Jesus will not stop revealing Himself. He will continue to do so, much of it by hardship and trials. The disciples will face the agonizing heartbreak of their beloved teacher being arrested and crucified and they'll all wallow in the shame of their own cowardice. Peter especially will bear the guilt of his denial of Christ. Thankfully, all of that gives way to incomprehensible joy at Christ's resurrection of course! But the trials and adversity by no means cease. These apostles will suffer hardships, beatings, arrest, imprisonment, torture and death. And as hard as it may be to accept, Christ's grace is being poured out on them in all of it,

because Jesus stands revealed to them as Lord, God and Savior. They endure all standing in the promise of Yahweh, possessing eternal life in every struggle, even in facing death itself.

So back to you, in your awful situations in life...are you seeing Christ as He has revealed Himself to you there?

Like the disciples on the lake, I think we too often see everything, including Jesus, according to the world. They were facing a problem—the wind was against them. They were struggling. Jesus allowed this, even directed it, for their benefit. Jesus reveals Himself to them as Yahweh, the God of salvation, yet they can't accept it. Their hearts were hardened. They were considering Jesus according to the world and how they thought things should be.

Christians are not immune to this. When we're faced with serious hardship, challenges and afflictions the temptation is to focus on the hardship, challenge or affliction. That's the problem at hand and it's up to us to solve it. When it's beyond our power we react with fear and despair. And if we perceive the truth of God's providence behind all things to use such circumstances for our ultimate good, we often can't accept that. If Yahweh isn't doing things according to our plans, then Jesus is a ghost to be feared.

But God continues to reveal Himself to us in Christ. *"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."* He often will not remove the hardship, challenge or affliction; maybe sometimes He will. But that broken circumstance reflects the nature of the world, and what Christ reveals to you in His Word is His victory over that world, over its death and over its prince of darkness.

What finally broke the hardness of the disciples' hearts? It wasn't the exorcisms, healings, miraculous feedings of multitudes or even the authority to control nature itself. It was the death and resurrection of Christ. The very same truth the Holy Spirit has placed in your heart through the proclamation of the Gospel! In this Yahweh has revealed His power by delivering us

from that which would destroy us—the evil infecting this very creation that our flesh holds so dear!

Jesus used that night of struggle and hardship to reveal Himself more fully to the disciples and they reacted with awe and amazement at Jesus' power even though, admittedly, they still didn't get what Jesus was all about; that He was Yahweh come to fulfil the promise of salvation.

In the midst of your hardships and challenges Jesus is calling you to see not just the brokenness of the world that is in front of your face, but the mighty work of His cross and empty tomb that have already secured your deliverance from this and all other affliction. If all you can perceive is the affliction, that's a clue that you're too focused on the world and you're relegating Jesus to just being a ghost hanging out in the wings adding to your burdens. If the only mighty work you care to receive from Him is deliverance for this earthly life, your heart stands hardened.

We all need to open our eyes anew every single day and be awed and amazed at the mighty works of Christ revealed in the Gospel—Yahweh's grace and power to save us into forever life through Christ. The broken and contrite heart receives this most precious of gifts and considers the struggles of today just another reason to hold more tightly to the Savior who has secured for us a glorious tomorrow in eternity. While it is certainly good and right for us to ask relief from our hardships and struggles in this life (as many did and were blessed during Jesus' earthly ministry), we do so in light of knowing the proper work of Christ, securing forgiveness and salvation through the cross and tomb, stands accomplished as our greatest good.

Don't harden your heart to Christ, demanding He change circumstances to suit your desire because, well, the way He has allowed this to be is somehow wrong. No, accept that all

things, even the tough things, are working for your good by the hand of Yahweh your Savior.

Open your heart to accept and be in awe of His mighty works that save you from the world and for eternity.

Amen.