

July 28, 2024
Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Wonderful Weirdness”

Mark 6:45-56

Jesus...is weird. Merriam-Webster defines weird as “of strange or extraordinary character” and Jesus certainly fits that definition. Dictionary.com says weird is “strange, odd, bizarre” and that fits too, at least in today’s Gospel lesson. But they add a second definition that hits the nail on the head when it comes to Jesus: “not functioning properly or as expected.”

Now of course Jesus is always functioning properly—that is practically the definition of being righteous and Christ is the very righteousness of God Almighty. But “functioning as expected”? No. Jesus is weird.

This was true in first-century Israel. Folks had all sorts of expectations for the Messiah. He would set right the corrupt worship practices at the temple in Jerusalem. He would be a great prophet like Moses, leading Israel to freedom from Rome through plagues and mighty miracles. He would be a great warrior like King David, raising an army and subduing all Israel’s enemies and making Jerusalem the most powerful city in all the world. He would be a divine judge, destroying the evil and raising up the faithful.

Nobody expected a humble Rabbi whose preaching and miracles ticked off the Jewish leadership to the point they would pressure the Romans into nailing Him to a cross. Jesus...is weird; not functioning as expected. Not to mention He didn’t stay dead—that’s REALLY not functioning as expected!

But it is also very true in the 21st century. Christians have all sorts of expectations of Jesus. He will give them peace and contentment. He will keep the evil and injustice of a fallen world away. He will reward folks for their faithfulness in life with good fortune. He will punish their enemies and the wicked. He will make the believer healthy, wealthy and happy. He would never allow them to suffer.

All of these afflictions happen to the folks in Christ’s church, and often the desired blessings don’t materialize as hoped for. Jesus...is weird; still not functioning as expected.

This is quite obvious in the Gospel reading today. Jesus has wrapped up the feeding of the 5000 and Mark tells us *“He made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.”* The original Greek is very clear; Jesus compels the disciples to get into the boat. And you’ve got to figure that Jesus, being Jesus, knows what kind of night they are going to have on the water. He compels them to go into great struggle and adversity.

Things then get even weirder. *“And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.”* And that’s not the weird part. *“He meant to pass by them, 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.”*

After they had been struggling all night against the wind and were likely exhausted and maybe even fearing for their own safety...Jesus comes and was going to walk right past them? Jesus’ intention wasn’t to come save them? Very, very weird...not functioning as expected. Especially when the miracle that follows makes clear Jesus could have powerfully intervened for their benefit at any time. Jesus seems very, very weird indeed.

But what is the result of all this weirdness; of Jesus not functioning as expected? Throughout all of these experiences the disciples are being made to understand that Jesus is fully

the God of their salvation and all of this testing ultimately serves to strengthen their faith in this truth and their dependence on Christ in the midst of tough and scary times. And let's remember, after Christ's earthly work is finished, these disciples are going to face much greater challenges than a bad night on the lake.

And folks, like it or not, and we usually don't, the challenges, hardships, pain and loss we face ultimately function the same for we who believe. We need look no farther than the Old Testament to see that when God has acted as expected, lavishing blessings of protection, prosperity and peace upon His people Israel, they reacted with faithlessness and idolatry. What brought Israel back to Yahweh? Hardship and suffering. It seems that when this life is good, we put faith in this life. When life gets rough we tend to remember who it is that has all power over it.

Jesus may send us into challenges and suffering. In fact, for most folks I can guarantee it. For some that challenge may be persecution for the faith. And weirdly enough, they might be considered more blessed. They are forced to choose, to by the power of the Spirit stand fast in faith and suffer for it. For most of us it's not so straightforward—it's physical deterioration, relationship struggles, injustices against us, financial struggles, stress, loneliness, depression—things in the midst of which it seems Jesus is not around; that He is passing us by.

But that's never true. You see, Jesus is weird. No one expected the Messiah, God's Son, to enter into human flesh and then to enter into our suffering, enter into our very death that death's power would be emptied in Him.

If God functioned as we would expect, sin would be punished, the guilty would suffer, the unholy would never come anywhere near the holiness of God. But God in Christ is weird, because steadfast love, grace and mercy is not what we deserve or expect. And sacrifice????!!! Sacrifice of God's own Son...for us????!!! Weirdness unbounded!

So when we find ourselves in hardship, struggle, emotional or physical pain, we can know that Jesus is with us there, knows it, has been through it. He has cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" endured it, and triumphed over it. And He is bringing us through that very same victory into which we stand baptized. Jesus is weird to us in that He allows suffering to take place, but our suffering in faith clings to Jesus and leads through this fallen world to life everlasting.

And I guess that's one of the reasons Jesus seems so weird to us. You see, He never had living a broken life in a fallen world as the priority. He knows it's broken and He knows the life we were designed for, the salvation God promises, is infinitely better—perfect joy in the glory and presence of God! His aim and purpose is always in bringing that life to His fallen creation.

We struggle to get our priority off this life, to set our hearts on God's promises in this life and to consistently look beyond the fallen in which we live to the perfect to which Christ leads. So of course Jesus seems weird. He doesn't act as this world expects. He is not of the "normal" of this world. He is not fallen. He is the perfect Christ, bringing us to the place He has prepared for us and that place is way beyond normal. It's paradise!

So when you find yourself in distress and you're tempted to think Jesus isn't there with you, remember, yes, He may, in fact, want you right there in the distress, because He is weird and works through suffering for your eternal good. But call on His name there and know He has not abandoned you. He has been there Himself to save you. His mission is to see you through it all.

Trust that one day His weird plan will be complete, and you will be at His destination in eternity. In that day I think we will all joyfully realize that we were the ones being weird, having

expected so little of Him here when His expectation was bringing us to a perfect forever life of which we couldn't even conceive. Amen.