

July 29, 2018

Mark 6:45-52:

“And He Got Into the Boat with Them”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Six Sundays ago, we read the Gospel of Mark where it is recorded that Jesus and his disciples got into a boat to sail across the sea of Galilee. A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. The disciples woke Jesus up and he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. The disciples were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

After Jesus calms the storm, Mark goes on to record other events. The twelve saw the casting out of an unclean spirit from a man who lived among the tombs and could not be bound with shackles and chains. The disciples witnessed the curing of a hopeless case of a bleeding woman and the raising of a girl from the dead. They saw Jesus rejected in his hometown of Nazareth, and they themselves were sent out with power to cast out demons and heal the sick. And these twelve disciples saw Jesus feed 5000 men from 5 loaves and 2 fish.

When we think of these events that happened in the lives of the twelve, we need to think of them much like we might think of ourselves being strengthened in the Word and Sacraments. In the Word and Sacraments Jesus comes to us so that we may believe and be preserved in the faith. While we may not find ourselves living these events as the twelve did, we still do "live" them whenever we read and meditate upon them. They were designed for the twelve and are designed for our spiritual well-being.

Now, in our Gospel lesson for this morning, we are told that Jesus "made" his disciples get into a boat to sail back to the other side - to Bethsaida. The fact that Jesus *strongly urges* them into the boat is important. In this life, Jesus often places his people in various situations for important reasons. In the case of the twelve, it is as if they have now come full circle to revisit the sea and the wind. This time Jesus isn't in the boat with them as he was before. They are all alone. So, what do you think that Jesus is doing with the twelve? What are we to learn through them in this experience?

In this life, the Lord often marks a beginning of growth by using an event in our lives as a point of reference as we begin to travel down a road of self-examination. For a period of time he shapes and molds us by his Word and Sacraments until we are brought to a second moment that might be very similar to the beginning in order that we might examine where we were and our growth or lack thereof. Again, it is as if the twelve have come full circle to revisit the sea and the wind. Mark records:

And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 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.

How often in our lives do we find ourselves facing the sea and waves all alone? We have prayed to God for protection, we have been studying his word, and we think that we are totally prepared and very

strong. We like to think that we have progressed in our walk with the Lord. Then the Lord makes us go into the boat and the wind is against us. Our text says that Jesus “saw that they were making headway painfully.” The Greek word for “painfully” is much more vivid than this. Our English Standard Versions don’t really capture the full flavor of what’s going on here. The disciples were being tormented.

Have you wrapped your mind around all of this so far? Jesus made them go into the boat. Now they are being tormented. They hadn’t done anything to deserve this. No answer is given as to why this was happening. Such is the Christian life. We often find ourselves being tormented for extended periods of time, and we often waste a lot of time trying to understand why we are going through whatever it is we are going through. And Jesus is watching the whole thing from afar. Isn’t that quite a trip?

But it doesn’t stop there! It gets even more interesting. Again, Mark writes: “And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, *walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them . . .*” Wow! We have got to pause and really try to understand this to get to the heart of what’s going on for the disciples and us. In order to reap the full impact of this, I would like to set before you the book of Job. Please listen very carefully to the portion I have set before you from the ninth chapter [4-8, 10-11]:

He [God] is wise in heart and mighty in strength - who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded? - he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens *and trampled the waves of the sea . . .* who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. *Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him.*

Notice in this quote from Job that it is God who trampled the waves of the sea. In our lesson, Jesus is walking on the sea. Furthermore, notice that from the perspective of Job, God passes him by. In our lesson, Jesus is walking on the sea and it says in regard to the disciples that “he [Jesus] meant to pass by them.” Finally, keep in mind that in the opening of Job’s words, he raises the question: “who has hardened himself against him [God], and succeeded?” Keep in mind that the disciples have met the sea and wind once before and asked “Who is this?” Now, having been further educated in the truths about Jesus, will they harden themselves against who Jesus really is and succeed? It says at the close of the text: “And he [Jesus] got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”

The whole point of the book of Job is the point of our Gospel lesson for this morning. All that matters is for God to break through the hardness in such a way that faith is created and strengthened until one reaches the end. Only God can break through and sustain a person throughout the most severe crises. The Lord is compassionate and merciful in every way all the time. The purpose of the Lord is to bring us to him and keep us there. Nothing matters but to reach the destination that God has in mind for us. When the whole world is collapsing on us - or when the sea and the wind rage - it is our Savior who opens up the particulars of the universe in order to show us that he is victorious and will give us that victory in him when

it is all said and done. Sometimes in this process, it appears that God means to pass us by. These are the moments when we feel like we have no answers and that God has left us alone to be tortured by whatever. The truth is that he is opening up the cross and the forgiveness of sins. He is answering the question: "Who is this?"

In our Gospel lesson, though Jesus means to pass by the disciples, he gets into the boat. It is here that we are reassured that when it seems that all is lost, Jesus is simply doing what must be done to get into our boat. The Lord would have us to acknowledge that we have no right to expect him to shield us from all torture. We have no claim on the Lord like that. We are entirely at God's mercy who uses torture in our lives to demonstrate his grace and show us just how merciful he really is. When we realize these things, we have nothing to say or do but to repent for accusing God of not caring for us, and for being angry at what feels like unjust torture when all along God is breaking through our hardened hearts.

Job says in the twelfth verse of the ninth chapter: "Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'" In our Gospel lesson it says that when the disciples "saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.' **And He Got Into the Boat With Them**, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded . . ." Indeed! What else is there really for us other than to be astounded when Jesus tells us to take heart and gets into our boat?

Jesus is doing good things on the sea and in the wind and whenever we are tortured. He is cutting through it all that he might sit in our boat and get us to the other side. He puts us through whatever it takes that we may know that our Redeemer lives, and further trust that he will stand on the latter day upon the earth, and in our flesh we will see him. He sets before us his cross in ways that we may not necessarily like in order to give himself and eternal life in heaven. He must continually break through our hardness. As Peter writes (1:6-7), "you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ!"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott