

Mark 6:45-56 - "Take heart; it is I"

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Our Gospel reading for today picks up from last week, where we heard about Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. One of the things Jesus revealed to us through this miracle was that He (who was with them and is with us) is God, who is in control of all things for our good. I'm guessing that when, in our text, we're told that the disciples "*did not understand about the loaves,*" this was one of the things they didn't understand; not only that Jesus is God, but that as God (along with the Father and the Holy Spirit) He is in control of the good things and bad things of this world for our eternal good. So, in today's Gospel reading Jesus reveals this to them (and us) again, but this time He shows us more clearly that He is in control of the bad things that trouble us.

After feeding the 5,000, Jesus "*immediately...made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd.*" Our text goes on to point out that "*when evening came, the boat was out on the sea...and they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.*" The Greek words for "*painfully*" and "*against*" could also be translated "*harassed*" and "*hostile.*" So verse 48 could be translated: "*They were harassed by the waves, and the wind was hostile to them.*" But normally words like harassed and hostile are used if you're talking about a person, not a thing like the wind, unless someone was controlling the wind and the waves to harass and be hostile to the disciples.

Last week I mentioned that the people at that time often associated the sea and the large creatures in it with evil. So when you consider that the disciples were sailing on a turbulent sea, through Gentile territory, at night, it's likely that they were thinking that the forces of evil were using the wind and the waves to harass them. Perhaps that's why, "*when they saw [someone] walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost [evil spirit] and cried out, for they...were terrified.*"

Do you at times find yourself a similar situation? You're making headway painfully. Nothing or very few things seem to be going your way. The wind is against you. You may blame others and even the devil for your troubles, but you may also be thinking that part of the blame lies with you because of something sinful you have thought, said, or done. Whatever the reason for your troubles, you need help. So you cry out, like the disciples in our text.

It doesn't sound like their cry was a formal prayer, but simply a scream. Thankfully, Jesus knew why they were screaming and He immediately spoke to them and said, "*Take heart; it is I.*" In the Greek we're told that Jesus said, "*take heart; ἐγώ εἰμι*" (which means "*I AM*"). "*Take heart; I AM.*"

"*I AM*" in Hebrew would be, יהוה (Yahweh), which is the personal name of God in the OT who came to Adam and Eve to save them after their fall into sin, even though they weren't crying out for help. Yahweh also came to save the Israelites, who were crying out to God to deliver them from slavery in Egypt.

So, by saying, "*Take heart; I AM,*" Jesus was saying not only that He was God, but that He was with them to save them. This became especially clear when Jesus, who was walking over the waves of the sea, "*got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.*"

But even before Jesus spoke these comforting words, *“Take heart; I AM,* Mark reveals something just as comforting for us today. Earlier in our text Mark mentioned that Jesus, even though He knew that His disciples were struggling out there on the boat, didn’t immediately go out to help them but waited until *“the fourth watch of the night”* (3-6am), when it was dark. Why? Partly to assure us that He is working, even through our darkest times of trouble; even when we can’t see Him, for our good and the good of others.

Remember also the situation with John the Baptist (mentioned earlier in this chapter). John was in prison and soon to be beheaded, and yet Jesus, who knew of his situation (Mt 11:1-15), didn’t come to set John free. Or did He?

How does God set us free from all sin, suffering, death—all evil? Through Jesus Christ, who took our sins upon Himself, payed for our sins through His damning death, and then triumphed over all evil through His resurrection from the dead. Why? For our good—our eternal salvation. But before Jesus’ rose on Sunday, there was His crucifixion and a Saturday of waiting.

The cross and that holy Saturday of waiting is like our journey through this world on the ark, as we wait for our landing in paradise. Thankfully, we wait knowing and believing the best news of all, which Jesus revealed to His hard-hearted disciples. The Good News is that Jesus, who is God, who loves us, and who is more powerful than all sin, suffering, and death—all evil, is with us and working through all thing for our good. After that holy Saturday of waiting, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead reveals this Good News most clearly.

Therefore, since our almighty Lord and Savior is with us, even in the midst of our troubles, working all things together for the good of His people, what do we have to worry about? If we in faith say “Yes!” to the Cross of Jesus—“Yes!” to the Good News that Jesus worked through His suffering and death for our good, then we are also saying “Yes!” to the crosses—the troubles in our lives, which the Lord at times allows us to go through for our good and the good of others.

One of the ways the Holy Spirit blesses us and others through times of trouble is by enabling us to turn to God in repentance and faith, crying out to Him for help, and then strengthening our faith in the help He has given us and continues to give us through His Word and Sacraments, which focus on the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of our eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. This in turn leads others to Christ when they see that we handle the troubles of life by calling upon and trusting in Jesus, who gives us peace.

All glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] In the Gospel reading, the disciples were afraid when they saw Jesus walking on the water because they didn’t know it was Jesus. Fear of the unknown is like being afraid of going to the dentist for the first time. When we don’t know what’s going to happen, we tend to think of all kinds of scary things that could happen.

For example, what do you think will happen if I poke this pencil into this plastic bag? Water will pour out everywhere! [Take a sharp round pencil and poke it all the way through the bag. It shouldn’t leak :]

During the scary times of our lives, when we don’t know what’s going to happen, remember that Jesus does know. Remember also that Jesus death on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead is meant to remind us not only that He loves us, but that He is stronger than all the things we’re afraid of. Remember also He promise to always be with us to get us through the difficult times in our lives, like this pencil going through the water in this plastic bag, and to the other side—to heaven, with Him.