

"JESUS WALKS ON WATER."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 6:45-52

Introduction. Jesus sends them away.

Let me read the first two verses again and this time listen very closely to hear the strong note of danger in the text.

Mark 6:45-52 *Immediately he made* his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while *he dismissed the crowd*. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, *he went up on the mountain to pray*.

Jesus had performed one of His greatest miracles. He fed somewhere between five and fifteen thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. As I said last week that miracle was the most public of all Jesus' miracles and maybe of all of the other miracles put together. It was huge, very impressive, a huge attention getter and a praise getter.

What did Jesus do after the miracle? He immediately made the disciples go away in a boat (the word made means compelled or forced). The sense here is that the disciples didn't want to go, it's late, they were in a deserted place and they didn't want to leave Jesus by Himself. But Jesus prevailed and sent them away. Then He quickly dismissed the huge crowd. The disciples are immediately sent that way, the crowd is sent the other way and Jesus headed for the hills to spend several hours in prayer. What's going on here?

John gives us the answer in his telling of this story:

John 6:14-15 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" 15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

This the great danger that comes with miracles. There was a plot brewing to take Jesus by force and make Him king. Can you imagine having a king like Jesus with all the power to give you everything you need or want? If He can do that with bread just think what He can do to enemies?

Jesus knows the danger and He flees it. This is similar to Satan's temptation in the wilderness to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Jesus immediately separated the disciples from the crowd and then separated Himself from the crowd, as if to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

The Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way that we are and this is clearly a temptation. Jesus would not be king without first going to the cross. No shortcuts to glory.

Friends, there's a mountain of wisdom in this. We all love to do cool things that get attention and make us look good and get us praise. We love the complements and the accolades and the attention success brings.

Someone has said complements and praise should be treated like perfume, nice to smell as you walk by, but don't ever stop to drink it, it will kill you.

The disciples may have been basking in the glow of a great day perhaps thinking themselves to be something, enjoying the success and glory too much. Do we see the danger of our blessings and benefits? Do we see how the enemy is all around us trying to trip us up?

I heard John Piper talk about this in February, about how he was afraid of the danger of money and wealth and what it would do to his soul. So from day one all the royalties for all his books and all the honorariums from all his speaking all over the world, all that money goes straight to Desiring God Ministries. He doesn't take a penny. He lives in an older house in an older urban part of downtown Minneapolis.

He has denied himself millions and millions of dollars. All money from his own hard work, thinking, researching and writing books and traveling and speaking. He is guarding his heart from the seductions of this world that try to take us by force and make us proud or greedy or self-centered or self-reliant.

Jesus was aware of the danger of the applause and approval of men. He was much more interested in what God had to say. He didn't bask in the limelight, He would rather be in the light of God's words. He desired fellowship with God even more than He desired fellowship with people. That's how He kept balance, focus, perspective and from sin.

Jesus ascends to the mountain to pray.

This is remarkable when you think about it. Jesus had just demonstrated that He was God, He had created and brought into existence something out of nothing. Yet He turns to God in prayer, showing He's God and He's human.

Jesus prayed. Jesus, the Son of God, prayed to the Father. Jesus took time out of a very busy and demanding schedule to pray. Jesus practiced what He preached.

Matthew 6:6 When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Are we above Jesus? Do we have less need to pray than Jesus? How is the servant above the master? If Jesus prayed in His humanity, how much more should we in ours?

We can't perform the miracles He did, but we can imitate His prayer life and His devotion to the Father. Take advantage of every opportunity to spend time with the Father.

Jesus was surrounded by noise, hurry, crowds. He was pursued and sought out. Jesus had a far bigger paparazzi than the most popular Hollywood star. Prayer has Jesus' way for dealing with temptation and the craziness of life.

We live in an age of noise, hurry and crowds; of hustle and bustle, of constant activity and constant connection with friends through social media and technology.

We need digital breaks, we need breaks from the world. We need times and places to push the world back and create some holy space where we can hear God, hear the truth.

Noise and activity are deadly to our souls. Some of us are getting ready to binge on the Olympics for the next two weeks, endless hours of programing. Balance that with some silence, some quiet times to reflect on the Lord and on life and on the future.

Jesus made time for prayer at the expense of other human needs. It was late at night. He found a quiet undistracted place for prayer. Interruptions and distractions do more to hinder our prayers than anything else.

The key to serious prayer is solitude, a place free from the noise, hurry and crowds. Solitude makes us free to be earnest, to truly express ourselves without worry of others hearing, we will be free to be uninhibited. Find a time, find a place, find a method.

Use the outline of the Lord's Prayer, use Paul's prayers, use the Psalms. Pray the Scriptures. Talk to the Father every day. Get to your mountain to pray. We have little because we ask little (James 4:2).

Jesus decides to delay while the disciples struggle to make headway.

How quickly our lives can change. One moment the disciples were witnessing a mighty miracle and even assisting in the accomplishing of it. They were surrounded by a great crowd who was in awe. They were on stage and in the limelight of attention and approval. Life was good.

And the next moment they were in a boat, in the dark amidst wind and waves, in danger filled with anxiety and fear.

After blessings come trials. After seasons of plenty come seasons of want. After mountain tops come valleys. Winter follows summer, rain follows the sun, war follows peace, death follows life.

"In this life you will have affliction," Jesus says. The grindstone of affliction is God's means of sharpening us and our faith. By this means God renders us more useful to His purposes.

Jesus lets us struggle for a season. It makes us less full of ourselves and more ready to receive His help. Tempests come for a reason and when deliverance is delayed there's a reason for that as well. Sometimes He doesn't come until the fourth watch of the night (between 3 and 6 AM).

Jesus walks on the bay.

This is truly a great miracle. Moses by the power of God divided the sea so the people could walk across. Jesus by His own power simply walked on the sea.

Once again Jesus does something that's impossible. It's scientifically impossible. It can't be done, it has never been duplicated. Water in its natural unfrozen state can't hold up a human being. It's contrary to nature.

Jesus demonstrates He's not controlled by nature and nature's laws. Rather He controls nature. He created the water and He can walk on it. Not only are all things created by Him, but all things are created for Him.

Psalms 89:8-11 O Lord God of hosts,
who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?

9 You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

11 The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

Everything is Christ's servant, the wind, the waves, the water, the seasons and time itself. And remember they are always Christ's servants. Not just in the first century. He controlled them then, He controls them now. They are His waves, they are His winds, they are His storms.

Jesus says don't be afraid.

Fear is a natural human instinct. It's a gift from God to protect us from danger. Any one of us in the same situation would have reacted with fear. There is a natural fear of the unnatural, of the unseen, of things other worldly.

What's the antidote to fear? Jesus is the only one who can take away our fear. He takes away our fear of all fearful things.

Fear of the unknown, He knows.

Fear of the future, He is there and in control.

Fear of need or want, He has all we need and gives what we need.

Fear of being alone, He is with us always.

Fear of pain, He has suffered and He never leaves us or forsakes us and He turns our pain into light and momentary troubles that lead to a weight of glory.

Fear of dying, He died to take away that fear.

Fear of judgment and hell, He takes away that fear for all who repent and turn from sin.

Against all these fears Jesus speaks a triple word of encouragement, "Take heart. I Am. Fear not."

If not a single hair falls from our head without the knowledge and will of God, we can trust Him and His providence and presence and purpose in every action and event and circumstance. Christians are the only people on earth who have a legitimate reason never to be afraid.

All fear is unbelief. All fear is a reliance of our self; when our own resources fail us that's when fear sets in.

How often in the Gospels and how often with us does Jesus have to say, "Fear not," "Be not afraid," "Let not your hearts be troubled."

With Jesus we never have any reason to fear, and nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus and from His storm-ceasing, fear-abolishing, soul-saving presence. Nothing, absolutely nothing.

We are never truly alone in this world or alone in our needs. Jesus saw His disciples struggling to make headway out on the Lake. Jesus is well aware of our situations and circumstances. Jesus is constantly in deep prayer and intercession for us before the Father.

Marian Van Dyke was a woman of great faith and she exhibited much peace. She did have one concern in life. When she was diagnosed with Leukemia in 1986 she was concerned about who would take care of her if she got too sick to take care of herself. First, she asked her sister Hilda, but Hilda had a stroke and died. Then she asked her sister Edna but then Edna died.

But God was with Marian and knew her concern. She went into the hospital Friday morning and died quietly in her sleep early Tuesday morning.

The eye of our Lord is ever on us. Not only does He never slumber or sleep, He never blinks, He never looks away. His eye is not only on every sparrow, but on every saint.

Our way is never hidden from His view, our path no matter how difficult is completely known to Him. He never leaves us or forsakes us. Even when He seems distant to us He is never absent. He always comes at just the right time with just the right help. He may seem to be tarrying to us, but He always has a perfectly good reason and purpose. We can trust Him and therefore be patient with Him.

Application and conclusion.

If you are wondering what happened to Peter walking on the water, only Matthew tells that story. Mark writes his gospel based on what he heard from Peter and both Peter and Mark make the focus all about Jesus.

Jesus is the sovereign God over all creation and He has authority over everything.

God can do what no one else can do, or would even ever conceive of doing. God does things that are beyond our imaginations and beyond our explanations. The disciples missed it, and many today miss it.

The lesson of the feeding of the 5000 was lost on them. They still don't get that He has all power to do all things. Pray for your dullness, for your slowness to understand and believe. Pray for your little faith. Pray for eyes to see, pray for ears to hear, pray for a mind to understand.

The whole human race suffers from this disease, the disease of spiritual blindness and spiritual deafness and spiritual ignorance. They cannot see that Jesus is divine, that He is who He says He is, that He's God.

There's in this miracle story a picture of our world and our lives as we live between the first and second coming of Jesus.

The church of Jesus Christ is a ship left on a storm tossed sea. Her master and captain has gone up to heaven to pray, to ever intercede before the Father. He has left us here but has promised to return. Only then will all our troubles be completely over.

We are out on the sea of the world, laboring and struggling to make headway, sometimes making progress when the wind is favorable, sometimes rowing hard and getting nowhere when the wind is against us. And in all of life, our Lord is above looking down and watching (He saw them), interceding before the Father, protecting, providing, sending storms and giving deliverance.

Which is stronger, the world's winds or our Lord's Words? "Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."