

Mark 6:45-56

⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat¹ with them, and the wind died down. ¹ They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak and all who touched it were healed.

THERE IS A FUNNY STORY ABOUT A MAN FISHING IN SCOTLAND WHO ENCOUNTERS THE LOCH NESS MONSTER.

SINCE LAKE CHAMPLAIN IS RUMORED TO HAVE ITS OWN VERSION- CALLED "CHAMPY"-YOU ARE WELCOME TO IMAGINE THE STORY TAKING PLACE HERE INSTEAD OF THERE.

BUT THE STORY I FOUND TAKES PLACE ON THE LOCH NESS WITH A MAN, WHO DID NOT BELIEVE GOD EXISTS, FISHING ALONE.

SUDDENLY HE HEARS A GREAT DISTURBANCE AND OUT OF THE WATER A LONG NECK BURSTS FORTH. HE SEES A CREATURE WITH AN OPEN MOUTH AND LARGE TEETH SWIMMING HIS WAY.

IN FEAR AND DESPERATION HE CRIES OUT "GOD SAVE ME!" THEN HE HEARS A VOICE SAYING, "I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T BELIEVE IN ME."

"THAT IS TRUE" HE RESPONDED, "BUT TWO MINUTES AGO I DID NOT BELIEVE IN THE LOCH NESS MONSTER EITHER!"

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE ARE IN A CRISIS AND IT CAN GIVE BIRTH TO NEW OR GREATER FAITH IN THE LORD.

AND THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A CRISIS CAN CAUSE US TO LOSE OR WAIVER IN FAITH.

THE LATTER WAS THE CASE WITH THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS IN TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY.

THE STORY BEGINS BEFORE THE STORM, WHEN JESUS FED AROUND 5,000 PEOPLE WITH ONLY ENOUGH FOOD FOR ONE OR TWO.

AFTERWARDS, HE COMMANDED HIS DISCIPLES TO ROW ACROSS THE LAKE, WHILE HE WENT ALONE TO PRAY.

LATER THAT EVENING, WHEN JESUS LOOKED OUT AT THE LAKE HE COULD SEE THE BOAT, AND SEE THE DISCIPLES STRAINING TO ROW AGAINST A POWERFUL WIND.

THEY WERE STRUGGLING AND STRAINING TO OBEY JESUS AND YET THE FORCES OF NATURE WERE WORKING HARD AGAINST THEM.

MARK CHAPTER FOUR TELLS THE STORY OF THE DISCIPLE'S PANIC DURING A STORM ON THE SEA, WHILE JESUS SLEPT IN THE BOAT.

BUT NOTICE, ON THIS EVENING, THERE IS NO MENTION THEY FEARED FOR THEIR LIVES AT THIS POINT, ONLY THAT THEY WERE STRUGGLING.

SO JESUS DECIDED TO WALK ON THE WATER NEAR THEM, PERHAPS TO REASSURE THEM HE WAS AWARE OF THEIR STRUGGLES AND WAS NEARBY.

HOWEVER, WHEN THEY SAW A FIGURE COMING TOWARDS THEM ON THE TOPS OF THE WAVES, THEY DID NOT THINK ABOUT JESUS.

INSTEAD, FAITH GAVE WAY TO SUPERSTITION THAT THEY WERE SEEING A "WATER SPIRIT" THAT WAS COMING TO CAPSIZE THE BOAT AND DROWN THEM.

ONLY WHEN THEY HEARD JESUS CALL TO THEM, AND THEY RECOGNIZED HIS VOICE DID THEIR FEAR VANISH.

THEN JESUS GOT INTO THE BOAT TO REASSURE THEM FURTHER, AND THE WIND STOPPED.

THE SAVIOR WAS DISAPPOINTED IN THEM, MARK SAYS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND HIS POWER, WHICH THEY HAD WITNESSED IN THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISH.

YOU SEE, FEEDING THE HUGE CROWD IN THE WAY JESUS HAD, AND WALKING ON WATER, WERE BOTH MIRACLES THAT NO ONE ELSE COULD DUPLICATE.

THEY REVEALED JESUS' DIVINE NATURE AND YET HIS DISCIPLES STILL DEMONSTRATED LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF WHO JESUS WAS AND WHAT HE COULD DO.

THE ROOT OF THEIR PROBLEM WAS THAT THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE JESUS' REAL IDENTITY AND HIS POWER.

THEIR LACK OF AWARENESS WAS A STARK CONTRAST TO THE IMMEDIATE RECOGNITION OF JESUS BY THE PEOPLE WHEN THEY CAME ASHORE.

THEY SAW JESUS AND BROUGHT FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND PERHAPS EVEN STRANGERS TO HIM TO BE HEALED.

YOU SEE, THE PLACE WHERE THEY LANDED WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE HAD HOT SPRINGS, WHICH MANY PEOPLE CAME TO FOR HEALING.

CONSEQUENTLY THERE WERE A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE AREA WHERE JESUS ARRIVED.

THE PEOPLE THERE DID NOT MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO RECEIVE THE HEALING JESUS OFFERED BUT RUSHED TO HIM, OR TO BRING OTHERS TO HIM.

THIS IS THE LESSON WE CAN LEARN FROM THOSE WHO ENCOUNTER JESUS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE GOSPEL READING.

THEY KNEW WHO HE WAS AND BELIEVED IN HIS HEALING POWER, AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO USE IT, AND THEY "SEIZED THE DAY", NOT WANTING ANY TO MISS OUT.

HERE WE ARE SHOWN THE BENEFITS OF RECOGNIZING NOT ONLY JESUS IS NEAR US, BUT ALSO WHAT HIS PRESENCE CAN DO FOR US.

IT IS TO KNOW DEEP DOWN THAT HIS PRESENCE IS REAL AND THAT IT MATTERS.

NO, WE DO NOT ALWAYS GET THE HEALING WE DESIRE, AND WE AND THOSE WE LOVE WILL STILL DIE OF ONE THING OR ANOTHER.

WE ALSO WILL FACE STRUGGLES IN FINANCES, CAREER, AND OTHER KINDS OF DISAPPOINTMENTS IN LIFE.

BUT JESUS STANDING BY US MATTERS, BECAUSE WE ARE NOT ALONE. NOR ARE WE ABANDONED BY GOD.

EVEN WHEN ARE NOT AWARE OF HIS PRESENCE, THE LORD IS NEAR US AND HIS SPIRIT IS WITHIN US.

THE REV. CHARLES TINDLEY, WHOSE PARENTS HAD BEEN SLAVES, BECAME NOT ONLY A POWERFUL PREACHER IN HIS TIME, BUT ALSO A PROLIFIC HYMN WRITER.

ONE OF HIS HYMNS, "STAND BY ME" WAS INSPIRED BY GOSPEL STORIES OF JESUS ON THE WATER, AND IT OFFERS THESE WORDS OF HOPE AND FAITH.

"WHEN THE STORMS OF LIFE ARE RAGING, STAND BY ME;
WHEN THE WORLD IS TOSSING ME, LIKE A SHIP UPON THE SEA,
THOU WHO RULEST WIND AND WATER, STAND BY ME.

IN THE MIDST OF TRIBULATION, STAND BY ME.
WHEN THE HOST OF HELL ASSAIL, AND MY STRENGTH BEGINS
TO FAIL, THOU WHO NEVER LOST A BATTLE, STAND BY ME.

IN THE MIDST OF FAULTS AND FAILURES, STAND BY ME.
WHEN I'VE DONE THE BEST I CAN, AND MY FRIENDS
MISUNDERSTAND. THOU WHO KNOWEST ALL ABOUT ME,
STAND BY ME.

IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION, STAND BY ME;
WHEN MY FOES IN ARRAY UNDERTAKE TO STOP MY WAY,
THOU WHO SAVED PAUL AND SILAS. STAND BY ME.

WHEN I'M GROWING OLD AND FEEBLE, STAND BY ME.
WHEN MY LIFE BECOMES A BURDEN, AND I'M NEARING
CHILLY JORDAN. O THOU LILY OF THE VALLEY, STAND BY
ME."

HERE WE HEAR ABOUT FAITH IN THE MIDST OF THE STORMS OF LIFE. THE CALL FOR THE LORD TO "STAND BY ME"- IS MORE THAN A CRY TO GOD, IT IS ALSO A DECLARATION OF TRUST THE LORD IS NEAR AND CARES.

THIS BRINGS US TO WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS, WHO WERE NOT YET ABLE TO PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE "STAND BY ME".

THE GOSPEL STORY SUGGESTS JESUS KEPT TRYING TO PUSH HIS DISCIPLES TO GREATER FAITH, BUT THERE WERE TIMES THEY WOULD NOT BUDGE.

THIS IS WHY MARK WRITES THAT THEIR HEARTS WERE HARDENED.

THE DISCIPLES WERE NOT PERCEIVING THE SPIRITUAL TRUTHS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH JESUS.

THEY RECOGNIZED HIS FACE AND VOICE BUT DID NOT RECOGNIZE THAT HE COULD SEE THEM AND BE NEAR THEM AT ALL TIMES.

FEAR RATHER THAN TRUST, AND SUPERSTITION INSTEAD OF FAITH, OVERCAME THEM IN THEIR STRUGGLES.

NOTICE-THEY WERE DOING EXACTLY WHAT JESUS TOLD THEM TO DO WHEN THEY ENCOUNTERED THE WIND THAT WORKED AGAINST THEM.

AND THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME THE DISCIPLES HAD DIFFICULTIES OR WERE IN DANGER WHILE BEING OBEDIENT TO THE LORD'S COMMANDS.

THIS IS A REMINDER TO US THAT OBEYING JESUS DOES NOT ALWAYS MAKE FOR SMOOTH SAILING.

THIS IS A MISTAKE SOME CHRISTIANS MAKE. THEY THINK OUR CIRCUMSTANCES IN LIFE ARE GOVERNED BY OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD OR LACK OF IT.

YES WE HAVE MANY BLESSINGS FROM CHRIST, BUT NO WE, ARE NOT TAKEN OUT OF THE WORLD, OR COMPLETELY FREED FROM THE TROUBLES OR GRIEFS OF LIFE.

IN FACT, FOLLOWING JESUS CAN SOMETIMES BRING FORCES OF EVIL AND ADVERSITY TOWARDS US, RATHER THAN AWAY.

HOWEVER, JUST BECAUSE WE DO NOT SEE JESUS DOES NOT MEAN HE IS UNAWARE OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCE OR IS BUSY SOMEWHERE ELSE, AND THUS IS NEGLECTING US.

SOMEONE ELSE EXPLAINS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS A SHIP, AND SAID:

“FAITH IS THE RADAR THAT GUIDES THE SHIP INTO PORT WHEN THE PERSON CANNOT SEE.”

THIS IS ONE OF THE POINTS THE GOSPEL WRITER MARK IS MAKING WITH HIS STORIES ABOUT JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES.

THIS STORY IS A CALL TO FAITH-AND A CALL TO LOOK FOR, AND TO, JESUS.

THIS WAS THE PROBLEM THE FIRST DISCIPLES HAD TIME AND TIME AGAIN, INCLUDING UP TO THE TIME OF JESUS’ ARREST AND DEATH.

THEY HAD BEEN AROUND JESUS AND WITNESSED HIS MANY MIRACLES, INCLUDING THOSE NEVER DUPLICATED BY OTHER HEALERS.

THEY HEARD NOT ONLY HIS PUBLIC TEACHINGS BUT WERE PRIVY TO PRIVATE INSTRUCTION AND INFORMATION ABOUT HIS MISSION.

AND YET, THEY WERE SLOW TO PERCEIVE THE REVELATION OF GOD THAT WAS RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES.

FROM THIS WE ARE REMINDED THAT SOMETIMES NEWLY SAVED CHRISTIANS CAN DISPLAY GREATER OR DEEPER FAITH THAN THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN WITH CHRIST FOR THE LONG HAUL.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN ONE IS BETTER THAN THE OTHER. IT IS NOT TO BE A MATTER OF SHAME OR PRIDE, BUT RATHER A REMINDER THAT WE ARE ALL HUMAN AND STILL SINNERS.

THE DISCIPLES’ EXPERIENCES CAN ENCOURAGE US BECAUSE THEY SHOW US THAT TRUSTING IN JESUS, RECOGNIZING HIS PRESENCE IS NOT A ONE TIME THING.

INDEED FAITH NEEDS TO BE RENEWED DAILY, SOMETIMES OVER AND OVER AGAIN DURING THE SAME DAY.

SURELY THAT IS ONE OF THE MANY REASONS GOD PLACES HIS SPIRIT WITHIN FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. GOD KNOWS WE WILL NEED THE SPIRIT’S HELP.

GOD KNOWS HUMAN LIFE IN THE SIN-FILLED WORLD IS A MIXTURE OF FAITH AND TRUST VERSES FEAR AND UNBELIEF.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT JESUS NEVER GAVE UP ON ANY OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES, AND HE WILL NEVER GIVE UP ON US.

INDEED, THE LORD WELCOMES OUR PRAYER “STAND BY ME”, AS DECLARATION OF OUR NEED FOR HIM, AND OUR FAITH HE IS HERE WITH US.

LET US CLOSE WITH A PRAYER BY MARTIN LUTHER, WHICH RECOGNIZES THE POWER FOUND IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS.

BEHOLD, LORD, AN EMPTY VESSEL THAT NEEDS TO BE FILLED. MY LORD, FILL IT. I AM WEAK IN THE FAITH; STRENGTHEN ME.

I AM COLD IN LOVE; WARM ME, AND MAKE ME FERVENT, THAT MY LOVE MAY GO OUT TO MY NEIGHBOR.

I DO NOT HAVE A STRONG AND FIRM FAITH; AT TIMES I DOUBT AND AM UNABLE TO TRUST YOU ALTOGETHER. O LORD, HELP ME.

STRENGTHEN MY FAITH AND TRUST IN YOU. IN YOU I HAVE SEALED THE TREASURE OF ALL I HAVE.

I AM POOR; YOU ARE RICH AND CAME TO BE MERCIFUL TO THE POOR. I AM A SINNER; YOU ARE UPRIGHT.

WITH ME, THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE OF SIN; IN YOU IS THE FULLNESS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THEREFORE I WILL REMAIN WITH YOU, OF WHOM I CAN RECEIVE, BUT TO WHOM I MAY NOT GIVE. AMEN.

SERMON SUMMARY: MARK 6:45-56- "RECOGNIZING JESUS"

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