

<sup>45</sup> Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> After he said good-bye to them, he went away to the mountain to pray. <sup>47</sup> Well into the night, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> He saw them straining at the oars,<sup>[b]</sup> because the wind was against them. Very early in the morning<sup>[l]</sup> he came toward them walking on the sea and wanted to pass by them. <sup>49</sup> When they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, <sup>50</sup> because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke with them and said, “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” <sup>51</sup> Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. They were completely astounded, <sup>52</sup> because they had not understood about the loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

### **Don’t be afraid. I am.**

You’ve just gotta have faith. Maybe you’ve heard those words during a challenging time. All sorts of people will throw out talking points or bumper sticker theology as if to help in time of need, but it doesn’t work or encourage. Rather than point someone to their faith, it’s better to point them to the object of their faith, something physical, something tangible that they can hold on to for hope in time of need.

Because faith isn’t merely a mental process If it were the disciples would have rested on the raging sea after all Mark 4 (Jesus was asleep on the cushion when the disciples ran to him, *‘Teacher don’t you care that we are about to drown.’* wasn’t that long ago but Jesus was with them then. Now it’s early in the morning, 4am and they’re out on the Sea of Galilee because Jesus made them go. But taking into account their reaction we understand faith is more than mental exertion it involves the whole life. It’s more than just saying, it’s doing. The knowledge, will, and assent and even then I down play the knowledge part.

Faith is trust. It’s the trust of an infant who eagerly longs for mom and knows she will take care of him. Faith is simply trust even when the world around us and reason tell us, “Be afraid. No one will help you.” Faith is as the writer to the Hebrews states, *“Faith is what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (Hebrews 11:1). This is what the writer to the Hebrews tells us as the Heroes of faith held on to and hoped for despite the fact that the fulfillment of that hope seemed so far off. *“These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth”* (Hebrews 11:13).

We too can keep the faith. Not by a strenuous mental exercise but by looking to Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith. Our faith however doesn’t look back at itself but rather at the one who forgives and perfects. The Holy Spirit is the one who creates, sustains, and keeps us in the one true faith. We have his Word. We have his promise. We have his faith.

So why are the disciples out on the boat in the middle of the night? Jesus sent them out there. He compelled or forced them to go. That isn’t normal, not even for a fishermen. You didn’t just go out on the Sea of Galilee at night. It’s dangerous. But Jesus made the promise that he would see them on the other side. The disciples did what they knew best, they pressed on. There is no mention of terror just straining at the oars (although we’re not so sure they had oars on their fishing vessel). They were straining in their drive. There is no mention of wind or waves. This isn’t anything like Mark chapter 4 where they were terrified for their lives. They were straining against the wind. This was not just a tough sail, this was hard work. it was late. They were tired. Probably hungry.

What had terrified them wasn’t the wind and the waves but rather a vision of a ghost coming to them out on the water. They saw Jesus and Jesus had every intention of passing them by (This is the little detail that Mark adds to our story) and they were terrified. What’s going on? First he forces them out on the water. Surely he would have known the great difficulty of night time travel and then when he gets close he has every intention of passing them by. They cried out terrified of him and this is beneficial. This almost looks like those moments when Father’s terrify their children just for mommy to say, “Daddy’s being silly.” Is Jesus picking on his disciples? Is there a point to this?

It looks like an opportunity to exercise faith. Faith is given. It is planted in the heart through the power of the world. It is then cultivated, formed, molded through the terror and trials of life. But faith is not seeing it is hearing.

Jesus isn't there to terrify the twelve. He isn't there to bring down God's judgement. He is there to prove he is in control, even when the world seems to be falling apart. He says to the twelve, *"Have courage! I AM. Do not be afraid."*

Like the disciples, there are moments when the wind picks up and the drive is hard: a job comes to an end or we encounter new burdens. Stress takes its toll. The days become long and we're in need. We're making headway but it's painful and we're tired. From sickness, burdens, or the death of friends or family. Combine that with the other worries and cares of life and the uncertainty of where Jesus is compelling us to go and it wouldn't surprise me if we too were terrified screaming, "We've seen a ghost" if Jesus were to appear to us. We don't know why pain and problems come but we do know that God has allowed it to happen. In the meantime we are fearful, exerting all our strength trying to get out of whatever we've gotten into.

Why? Because at times our faith is merely a mental exertion and not the firm trust on the one who holds us in his hand. We know where we can turn for help, but as sinful people, we often don't get it. It's at these moments when I wonder why Jesus didn't greet them with, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" At our lowest point we'll ask, "Why did you send me here? Where are you? Don't you even care? Are you even listening?" When we feel all alone, God is there. We are never alone. We know where we can turn to to find help.

Mark makes it known to us that Jesus intention was to pass them by. There are two major event in the Old Testament where God passed by someone. The ones He passed by were the prophets Moses and Elijah at both times we find the low point in the prophets life. For Moses this was after he came down from the mountain and found God's people breaking every commandment with a golden calf. For Elijah this came after his defeat of the prophets of Baal, after he fled into the wilderness, hid in a cave and cried out to God, "I'm the only one left and they're trying to kill me too." God spoke to them, God passed them by, but they didn't see his face.

Jesus intended to "pass by" his disciples but he did something else. He stopped and got into their boat. Jesus, the God-man, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, (he is the very same being as the father) true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, This one came down. Did not pass them by. Got in the boat and the wind ceased. They were looking at God face to face and yet they couldn't understand what they were seeing. They couldn't see that Jesus was God, which is why Mark says, *"They had not understood about the loaves."* Faith does not come from seeing.

The whole incarnation is about God not passing you by, it's about God making good on His promises and saving His people, not from some faraway place but by coming down, climbing into our boat in the midst of the storm, by joining us in our trouble and our suffering. Sure he's sent us out. He hasn't left us alone. From the moment of baptism, the Lord's promise never leaves. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He continues to make his presence known to you as you receive his forgiving words of absolution. You are reminded of his presence in his Word.

He has given us his word and joined us to his church. That's why the church sanctuary called the Nave. We get Navy, Navel, from this word. It refers back to the church as a ship. In many of the older churches the ribs are intended to look like a boat. Some may say the church looks like a shipwreck but those who are sitting in the belly of the ship, while the waves of the world come against you, you hear Jesus come to you and say, "Have courage. I am. Do not be afraid." Jesus says to us that he is the Lord our God. The great I am of the Old Testament. He is the one who came to Moses in the burning bush and he comes to us today with these same words. "Don't be afraid."

IN Communion he comes to us physically and says, "It is I. Don't be afraid." With bread and wine he comes to you with his Body and blood for the forgiveness of sins for you to hold on to hope – not in yourself but in him. The LORD our God who climbs into our boat with us. And he is not only with us he is our God who has endured

Mark 6:45-52

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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the strain and pain of sin for you. He knows the heart ache and the hurt that you experience. He has died for you on the cross and has risen from the grave to give you eternal gains of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

We can be like the disciples, we can be terrified, hard hearted, and lacking understanding yet Jesus comes to us all the same and gives us himself to forgive us. We cling to his promises and each day he says, "Don't be afraid." In spite of your circumstances, in spite of the danger we are sent out into. He promises, "I am with you always until the very end of the age." Though we will have trouble we can take courage because he has over come the world. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples that he is always in control, even when we can't see him or feel him. Even when we hurt and suffer or are terrified of his presence he has compassion on you.

He calls out to us, "Take heart, It is I. Don't be afraid." Strains and pains are sure to come, but as a child of God you know where you can turn for help in your time of need We have a God who does not pass us by. He has compassion on us and joins us in the boat. Amen.