

WE CAN ONLY BE AT PEACE WHEN JESUS IS IN THE CHURCH

Sermon for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, 2021

Mark 6:45-56

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before Mark 6:45-56: ⁴⁵ **Immediately Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side at Bethsaida, while He was sending the crowd away.** ⁴⁶ **After He had taken leave of them, He went away into the mountain to pray.** ⁴⁷ **When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land.** ⁴⁸ **When Jesus saw that they were having great trouble as they rowed, because the wind was against them, He came to them, about the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea. He wanted to go past them.** ⁴⁹ **When they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought that He was a ghost and cried out.** ⁵⁰ **For they all saw Him and were terrified. However, He immediately spoke to them, “Be courageous! It is I. Stop being afraid!”**

⁵¹ **Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were altogether amazed in themselves.** ⁵² **For they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts had been hardened.**

⁵³ **When they had crossed over, they came to the land at Gennesaret and anchored there.** ⁵⁴ **When they had come out of the boat, people immediately recognised Him.** ⁵⁵ **They ran all over that region and began to carry those who were sick on their stretchers to wherever they heard He was.** ⁵⁶ **Wherever He went, into villages, cities or farms, people would lay down the sick in the market places. They begged Him that they might touch even the hem of His garment, and all who touched it were made well.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus once said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will certainly not pass away”* (Mark 13:31). The Word of God, which spoke creation into being, will last longer than creation: it is eternal. Martin Luther once said, *“For some years now, I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”*¹ There is so much to study from God’s Word and always more to learn. Each time we read from the Bible, we always seem to pick up something we missed the first time. That is why studying the Bible is a lifelong event. We dare never to put it down as though we know all that has been written in its pages.

One thing that we may learn from this particular account of Jesus walking on water in the Gospel of Mark is that *with one major exception*, all of creation knows exactly who Jesus is. The major exception is *the human race*.

God the Father had announced the identity of Jesus at His baptism and again at the transfiguration. The demons we read of in Mark were terrified because they knew who Jesus was as He cast them out. All sorts of diseases and harmful conditions knew who Jesus was as He healed the sick. Even death itself knew who Jesus was, as He raised the daughter of Jairus. The wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee knew who Jesus was as He calmed them with a word. Nevertheless, even His disciples, the ones who had witnessed these things, even they didn’t have a clue. It was not until the centurion witnessed the death of Jesus on the cross that a human being finally said, *“Truly this Man was the Son of God!”* (Mark 15:39).

Today’s account of Jesus walking on water shows us that nature knows who Jesus is, while the disciples remain confused.

Mark begins by saying, ⁴⁵ **Immediately Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side at Bethsaida, while He was sending the crowd away.** Why Jesus compelled His disciples to get in the boat, we do not know; Mark doesn’t say. However, in his account, John tells us that after Jesus had fed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish, the crowd began to say, *“This is truly the Prophet who is coming into the world.”*¹⁵ *Therefore, since Jesus knew that the people were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew again into the mountain by Himself”* (John 6:14-15). So it could be that Jesus wanted to spare His disciples from something dangerous and was eager to get them to safety.

¹ Luther’s Works. 54:165

We cannot really blame the people for wanting to make Jesus their king. Who wouldn't want a king who could provide free food for life? But the only problem is that Jesus did not come to be an earthly king. As He Himself said, *"The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). The people's desire to make Jesus their king was a *tremendous temptation*. It was a temptation to give up His mission to the cross and become a *"bread king"* instead. He could have avoided the cross and become very popular. Of course, the rest of us would all be condemned in our trespasses and sins. Obviously, the people who had eaten their fill did not know that Jesus was the Christ who had come to take on the punishment of their sins with His suffering and death on the cross.

Jesus recognised the temptation and moved quickly and decisively to get the disciples out of the situation before they also were enticed by the idea of making Him into a *"bread king."* He got them out onto the Sea of Galilee with instructions to go to the other side, and then He dismissed the crowds. **"After He had taken leave of them, He went away into the mountain to pray."** Though Jesus had plenty to do, He nonetheless retreated to be alone so He could pray. The Gospels often depict Jesus spending time alone in prayer.

While Jesus prayed, the disciples struggled to get across the Sea of Galilee **"because the wind was against them."** This was not like the other earlier time when they were caught in a storm while Jesus slept in the back of the boat.² At that time, they were terrified. This time, they were *frustrated*. In spite of all their experience as fishermen, they could not make any progress across the water. They were stuck in the middle of the lake, and it seemed like the harder they worked, the more they stayed in the same place. Mark tells us that Jesus **"came to them, about the fourth watch of the night."** The fourth watch of the night is the last watch before sunrise, from 3 to 6 am. The disciples had pretty much been on the lake all night, and Jesus had pretty much prayed all night. Jesus walked down the mountain to the shore, walked across the shore to the water, and then He just kept right on walking **"on the sea."** Once again, we see that the water knows who Jesus is and, at His command, it supports His weight.

On the other hand, the disciples, **"When they saw Him walking on the sea, they thought that He was a ghost and cried out."**⁵⁰ **For they all saw Him and were terrified.** Their frustration with the wind became terror at the figure they now saw walking to them on the water. They were right in assuming that the figure walking to them on the water was more than an ordinary man, but they were wrong in assuming that they were in any danger from this Man.

Jesus identified Himself to them and said, **"Be courageous! It is I. Stop being afraid!"** The phrase, **"It is I,"** is a form of the very name of God that Moses heard from the burning bush when God said, *"I AM WHO I AM."* *He also said: "This is what you shall tell the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you!"* (Exodus 3:14). Jesus basically told the disciples not to be afraid because He is the God who had spoken to Moses from the burning bush.

"Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down." Once again, we see that the wind knows who Jesus is. Nevertheless, the disciples do not get it, for Mark went on to say, **"They were altogether amazed in themselves."**⁵² **For they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts had been hardened.** These disciples had witnessed healings, resurrections, exorcisms, control of the weather, food production for large crowds, and now walking on water, and still the inspired Word of God states that **"their hearts had been hardened."**

Last Sunday, we heard how the feeding of the five thousand taught us that the Lord distributes His gifts to the church. The ship or boat has long been a symbol of the church. The depths of the sea often represent the forces of evil that attack the church. The account of Noah that we heard from our First Reading and the account of the disciples struggling to get across the Sea of Galilee both remind us of this.

When the disciples were in the boat all by themselves, the harder they worked, the more they stayed in the same place. The church is no different. We can work our hardest, but if Jesus is not in the church, we are stuck, and the *church is a shipwreck waiting to happen*.

The terror of the disciples reminds us of the terror we first have when we encounter Christ but do not know who He is. It is as the Apostle Paul told the church in Ephesus, *"You also were dead in your trespasses and sins. You once led your lives in those sins, following the ways of this present world and the ruler who governs the air, the spirit who is now working in the people who disobey"* (Ephesians 2:1-2). He also wrote to the church in Rome, *"This is so, because the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is hostile to God. For it is not subordinate to God's Law. Indeed, it cannot be"* (Romans 8:7). The Bible makes it very clear that before we come to know Christ and believe in Him, we wrongly believe He is our enemy, and He frightens us.

² Mark 4:35-41

But then the disciples heard His word, **“Be courageous! It is I. Stop being afraid!”** They learned that the figure coming toward them on the water was not their enemy but their Teacher and Friend. So it is when the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the Word of God as the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, *“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). As the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the Gospel, we come to know Jesus as our Saviour and Friend.

Jesus does not come to drag us down into the depths of judgment. Instead, He is the Friend who has endured the agony and shame of His beatings and crucifixion for us. He has ground out a salvation that is for all people. Just as Jesus has come, walking on water to His disciples, so He comes on the waters of Holy Baptism to us. He brings us the peace of eternal life.

The account of Jesus walking on water gives us one more example of the wind and the water proclaiming the identity of the Son of God. The hard hearts of the disciples give us another example that *we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him*. Despite the proclamation of all creation, we human beings don't understand. **Jesus must come to us, and He does**. He comes with forgiveness, and *where there is forgiveness there is also life and salvation*.

When Jesus **“climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down”**, everything became peaceful. Likewise, the church can only be at peace **when Jesus is in the church**. Without Jesus, the church is a shipwreck waiting to happen. In fact, it isn't really the church. With Jesus, the church is safe and sound. It is only when Jesus is present that we have the true church, the One, Holy, Christian Church that will last forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we rejoice to remember Your constant love, and we join Your Church everywhere to praise Your glorious name. We thank You that Your Spirit has made us Your adopted children in Jesus Christ, so that we may truly know You as our Father, call on You confidently in prayer, and know that You will hear us.

We pray for all believers in the family of the Church. Preserve Your remnant of grace. Give Your flock shepherds whom Your Spirit teaches and leads, and who earnestly proclaim Your pure Word of life. Grant that they may lovingly feed Your sheep with Your Word, and strive to protect them from all error. Rescue Your Church from the dangerous lies of all false shepherds, so that Your children may be linked together in love, may stand firm in a common purpose and may work together to spread the Gospel.

Show Your glory and power to the nations, O God. Turn those in authority whose eyes are spiritually blind to Your light, and from the power of Satan to Christ, so that they may possess the forgiveness of sins and a place among the children of God. Look with favour on our country, that liberty, justice, and high morals may hold sway, and destroy all ungodliness and evil influences.

Heavenly Father, let Your Spirit fill our homes. Let the word of Christ in all its richness live in the hearts of children, and enable all parents to be proper examples of Christian faith and life. Protect our families in every storm of life, and keep them from all evil.

Since You have sent Your Son into the world so that no one may die in His sins, keep us pure in a corrupt and sinful world, so that we may finally obtain the crown of life. Teach us to know better what You want for us, let us yield a rich harvest of godly deeds, make us able to stand firm in the faith. Help us to put to death the desires of our sinful nature, and to live in the Spirit, as those who will one day enjoy all that You have promised.

Heavenly Father, the source of all holy desires, wise plans, and right actions, give Your peace to all, especially to those who are facing pain, sickness, mental agony, spiritual distress, or any other burden of body or soul. Assure them of Your love and mercy, that they may place themselves in Your care, and receive from You everything they need for their lasting good.

Loving Father, You have invited us to bring our requests before You with thanks. Therefore accept these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God told Noah and his sons with him: ⁹ “Look! I Myself am establishing My Covenant with you and

with your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living being that has been with you, the birds, the domestic animals and all the wild animals together with you. It is for all those that have come out of the

ark, yes, for every living being on the earth. ¹¹ I shall establish My Covenant with you: Never again will the water of a flood cut off every living being. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² God also said: “This is the sign of the Covenant that I am giving between Me and you and every living being that is with you, for all generations to come. ¹³ I have put My rainbow in the clouds that it may be a sign of the Covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I shall remember My Covenant, which is between Me and you and every living being with every kind of flesh. Never again will the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the rainbow is in the clouds, I shall see it and remember the everlasting Covenant between God and every living being of every kind of flesh that is on the earth.”

¹⁷ God told Noah, “That is the sign of the Covenant that I have established between Me and all living beings that are on the earth.”

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth has its name. ¹⁶ I ask Him to grant you that, according to His glorious riches, He will strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and that you may be firmly rooted and established in love. ¹⁸ I ask that, with all God’s holy people, you will be able to grasp what the width, length, height and depth is, ¹⁹ and that you will know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ To Him who, by the power that is working in us, can do immeasurably more than anything we ask or imagine, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Mark 6:45-56

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