

Jesus in the Storm

Mark 6:45-56

We have another boat scene. Unlike last time, Jesus isn't in the boat asleep, but there is a storm and the disciples are having a tough time of it. This time Jesus comes to them, but his presence still doesn't cause them to really *see*. Why not? Mark has been unfolding this story, showing Jesus reveal his identity by what he does. The disciples, sent out two by two, were successful (6:12-13), but now their hearts are hardened (v52), and Mark wants us to ask ourselves if we understand what is going. We saw the loaves multiplied; do we get it? We hear of the works and identity of Jesus the Messiah. What does it mean for us? How are we changed, and are we with him on the mission or just cluelessly hanging out with him, our hearts hardened (Jn. 6:15)? Christians have long thought of the church as a ship (Latin *navis*), and applied this passage to our life together.

Sent into the Storm

Immediately Jesus rounds up his disciples and sends them to Bethsaida while he sent the crowd away (v45). One of three times we see him do so in Scripture, Jesus goes up to pray, finally getting some solitude (vv46-7). But as night turns to early morning, the disciples are still in the middle of the sea battling a strong wind. Jesus sees and comes to them, meaning to pass by but when the disciples see him they cry out in terror. They appear to be so consumed and overwhelmed in the task that his presence only makes it worse. But he responds immediately to their terror, saying "Take heart; it is I. Be not afraid" (vv50). The first thing to notice is that they are working long and hard. Why? Because they were obedient to Jesus. Hard work is a gift, and the joy of the Lord and soft hearts make our satisfying and fruitful, not suffocating (Prov. 15:13; Eccles. 5:12). Kids in school, remember this! We pray that God would not lead us into temptation, not that he would send us on permanent vacation. There are seasons of rowing upwind deep into the night. What was Jesus doing during their graveyard shift?

Not Looking for Jesus

Had the disciples been thinking about Jesus' command to feed the 5000, the loaves and twelve baskets and what it all meant, then they would have been looking for his next surprising move. They've just cast out demons and healed people, but now they're scared to death, thinking Jesus is a ghost. Mark says he "meant to pass by them" (v49). This is what God did when revealing himself in the Old Testament, "passing by" (Ex. 33:18-23; 1 Kgs. 19:9-12). But they're terrified, so he gets in the boat and emphatically says "It is I" (cf. Ex. 3:14). The hard work was good, but their tunnel vision prevented the disciples from understanding what was going on in the kingdom of God (v52). Jesus just showed himself to be *the* good shepherd. Would he not have compassion on them? The wind and waves are obeying the Son of Man, the Messiah whose dominion is from sea to sea (Ps. 72:1, 8). Jesus is the true man who would set everything to rights, and we see his humanity praying on the mountain and walking on the water. This is discipleship, not God-as-Inspector-Gadget.

Enlarge our Hearts

Even though the disciples' hearts are hardened, the mission of God goes forward. The people of Gennesaret are used to Jesus. They run around the whole region gathering the sick on their beds to Jesus (v55). As many as touched him were made well (v56). It's possible to be a Christian, to be in the boat with Jesus, and have no clue what he is doing! Obviously the disciples got a clue because Peter wrote this about himself. God wants us to row hard with our head up, looking for him and his glory, tired but praying like David: "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!" (Ps. 119:32). Take courage: don't forget in the dark what you knew in the light. Don't forget you're not in the boat alone. Jesus endured the storm of alienation and death on the cross for our sins so that all our trials and tribulations would work for our good (Rom. 8:28).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 6:45-52, 56

45 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. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. 56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

1. What did Jesus do while his disciples were in the boat (verse 46)? Why do you think he did this?
2. As a true man and our brother, Jesus prayed to the Father. What does he see is happening to the disciples (verse 48)?
3. When it's hard to serve and obey God, here is a good prayer that David prayed: "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!" (Psalm 119:32). When it is hard for you to obey God (or your parents!)?
4. The disciples don't understand about the loaves; they have _ _ _ _ hearts (verse 56). But Jesus continues his mission loving and healing people. Draw a picture of Jesus walking on water, coming to the disciples' boat. Include fish.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." --Mark 6:50