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Port Gardner Church
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Mark 6:45-52
The "I Am" in the Midst of the Storm

Mark told us about the death of John the Baptist, then the feeding of the five thousand. We did them in reverse order but that is of no real consequence to our teaching. Now we are at one of the most dramatic points in the entire book of Mark. Jesus Walking on the water.

So Jesus has just fed Five Thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. And as soon as these five thousand people had eaten (really it was more like 15-20,000 people, he makes the disciples get in their boat and go to the other side of the sea. And Jesus, he goes up to the mountain to pray... alone.

Now it takes about 7- 8 hours to cross the sea in the type of boat they were using, and of course it was a sailboat with oars as well. And if you know anything about sailing, you very rarely are going to run with the wind. In most cases, you are going to have to tack. Explain.

And if you need to go directly into the wind or you have no wind, you have to use your oars.

Now Jesus says they are having a Painful time making headway because the wind is against them. He can see them from the land. They've been out on the water for a few hours and are not making much headway at all.

So let's read the passage.

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.** 47 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.

So Jesus sends the disciples out on their own... again. Once again he tests their faith. They run into trouble without Jesus. What they don't understand yet... is that Jesus is always with them.

And Jesus, after dispersing the crowd (in the book of John it says that he fled because he was afraid that they would try and make him "king" again.)

After dispersing the crowd, Jesus goes up to a mountain to pray. To be with his father. To seek the Father's will.

And from this mountain, he can see the disciples and the boat they are in. He sees them struggling against the wind. Have you ever seen a boat in trouble? It's a difficult thing to witness. You want to help, but many times there is not much you can do. You can think you know what to do and think that you could fix the problem they are in. It's easy to be an armchair skipper, but trust me, unless you are in that situation, you don't know the complete circumstances.

But... we are not God. Jesus sees these guys and knows they are struggling. So he goes to them. And this is where the story gets really cool.

The fourth watch is about 3AM. This was the Roman system of watches. 4 watches. The Jews used a 3 watch system, so we can see that Mark was (once again) tailoring his writings to Gentiles.

And now Jesus goes to them... walking on the sea. And if that's not weird enough, Jesus intended to pass them by.

To what end? Why would he pass them by. Well I'm not exactly sure, how about this. In the OT God passes by Moses. In a rare self revelation of God, at Mt Sinai, the transcendent Lord "passed by" Moses in order to reveal his name and compassion. Again, at Mt Horeb the Lord revealed his presence to Elijah in "passing by". We also see this idea in Job 9:8,11

God alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

What are we seeing here:

1. In the OT God could not fully reveal himself to man, or man would surely. God is perfect and entirely holy. He protected Moses and Elijah from certain death.
2. Jesus changes all of this. He makes God accessible to Man. By intending to pass by He shows he is the God of the OT.
3. By drawing near to the disciples when they call and being physically present with them, Jesus shows that our relationship to God is now different. We now have an advocate that makes God's presence with us possible.
4. By walking on the sea, we see that Jesus is God and we are not. We see the awesome difference between ourselves and God. Between creator and creation.

God performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be numbered. And now Jesus, by walking on the water to his disciples displays a revelation of the glory that he shares with the Father and the compassion that he extends to his followers. He is showing them that he indeed is... the son of God.

Some folks want to try and disprove Jesus walking on the water. But think about this. These guys are fishermen. They have spent their life on this sea fishing for their livelihood. They know everything about it. Every kind of fish and creature in it. Every kind of weather. When they see Jesus, they are totally freaked out. They see a man or a ghost... walking on the water. This is not some trick.

So these guys call out to Jesus and instead of walking by...casually... he comes to their aid. He shows himself to them. He gets in the boat and calms the sea and in the book of John, we're told that as soon as he is in the boat they are amazingly transported to their ultimate destination. Immediately.

Once again, these guys know this sea. They know every nook every inlet, bay, beach, rock... they know it. They are not going to say that they were miraculously placed at their final destination unless... it happened.

And a little side note. This is the story where Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water to Jesus. But why doesn't Mark tell us that part of the story? Humility... or Humiliation.

The storm stops when Jesus gets in the boat. Being with Jesus isn't just an idea. It's not just a set of principles to live by. What we see here is that being a follower of Jesus means... Jesus is with us.

Jesus' presence overcomes the storms of our lives. And the disciples... they are completely amazed. So much so that they don't understand. They don't understand the feeding of the five thousand, they don't understand the healings... they still think Jesus is a good prophet. Just another teacher. A miraculous teacher but certainly not the Son of God.

Their hearts were hardened. This doesn't mean they were mad or rebellious... it just means they chose not to see the truth. They chose not to have faith.

Knowing about Jesus doesn't automatically result in faith in Jesus. Faith doesn't just happen automatically. It is a personal decision or choice that is ordained by God. And it always seems like this "decision" must be made in struggle and difficulty. There is always an element of faith in trusting Jesus. God never seems to give us all of the facts that we want or need in order to be convinced of HIM. There is always an element of faith. A chasm or canyon that must be jumped. A moment when we must say, my mind is not convinced, but I trust the God that tells me of His love. I trust the God that sent his son. I trust the God that has shown me his grace.

Where is Jesus? If you are a believer, he lives in you. He is with you always. You cannot run from him.

Where can I go, where can I flee to run from your presence...

He is there in the midst of your storms.

I want to say this about storms. Many times I receive prayer requests and in those requests is the emotion of fear. Fear that someone will die. I want to tell you about Jesus in the storm. I want to tell you about what is most important to God and what should be most important to us.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany just prior to WWII. Bonhoeffer was a well respected theologian who spoke out against the Nazis. He spent time in the US prior to the outbreak of the war. He took a position here in the states and probably would have stayed here the rest of his life. But the war broke out. And instead of taking refuge here in the US. Bonhoeffer went back to Germany. He went back to help his family, friends, colleagues and the members of his former congregation through the difficulties of the war.

He and all Christian leaders were mandated to sign allegiance to Hitler (not Jesus) as the head of the Church. Bonhoeffer refused and was taken to jail. Others around him were arrested and executed.

During this time, the Nazi's discovered that Bonhoeffer was involved in a plot to murder Adolf Hitler. He was executed just 2 months before the end of the war.

Bonhoeffer wrote: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

My point is this. Jesus is with us... even unto death. The storm will come, but the storm is not the issue. The issue is the eternity of our relationship with Jesus Christ. This is not our home. Jesus did not deliver Deitrich Bonhoeffer from physical death... but he was with him all the way. All the way to eternity.

Just as Jesus is with the disciples in the midst of the storm, so he is with you.

Every one of these disciples was killed for their faith. Everyone.

Should we expect any less? Thank God for a long and wonderful earthly life... but know that this is not all there is. The priority is not a problem free earthly existence. The priority is not our own personal comfort. The priority is not even the preservation of our own life... the priority is... and always will be ... Jesus.

Do you know him today? Or do you just know about him? Do you know the difference between yourself and Jesus?