

“Jesus, Just Being Himself”

Mark 6:45-52

Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost 2021; July 25, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

+++++

It is immediately after Jesus fed the five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus compelled His disciples to get into the boat and go back across the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. He Himself would remain behind and dismiss the crowd. After He had done so, he went up on the mountain to pray. The disciples, however, were in the boat in the middle of the Sea. Only Jesus was on the land. The sun was going down.

The disciples couldn't use the boat's sale because the wind was blowing toward them; they were going into the wind. So they had to use the oars. Rowing into the wind was difficult. Mark uses a word there that suggests that it was like torture, painful rowing into the wind. Yet, they had to.

There is a really cool detail at this point in Mark's narrative that comes to light when we compare it to Matthew's narrative. Mark says, that Jesus saw it (Mark 6:49). Jesus saw how they were suffering in their rowing. He saw their strain. He saw how hard it was for them. He saw what they were dealing with.

But Jesus's seeing was not an indifferent kind of seeing. It was not just like noting a fact in an indifferent way, like a scientist might do. Jesus saw with utmost care and concern. He saw with the utmost interest in what they were going through. In His seeing He identifies with them and enters into their difficulty with them.

He sees you like this.

So what does He do. He comes to them as they are straining at the oars on the Sea, as they are rowing into the wind (Mark 6:48).

He comes to you.

It is now the fourth watch of night. It was in the early morning hours before sunrise. Why did it take so long for Jesus to come to them? Was Jesus disregarding them from the time the sun went down until the early morning hours? Does it seem like that, rowing hard into the wind on the Sea, but being all alone? God not being there?

But then we take note of what Jesus was doing on the land all that time. He was praying (Mark 6:46). He was praying for them. He was interceding for them with the Father, the almighty. He was not disregarding them, but bringing them into the very presence of God. Jesus can do that.

He is praying for and interceding for you and bringing you to the Father, who names all the peoples of the human race (Eph. 3:14). When it seems like you are all alone, that God is doing nothing for you, the Gospel teaches us here that Jesus is praying for you, bringing you into the very presence of God.

Jesus was also holding them in His own almighty care. We see this from what He does when He comes to them in the fourth watch of the night. This holding them in His almighty care is not usually seen by human eye. Now we can believe it because we see what Jesus does.

He comes to them. He comes to them walking on the Sea. They all saw it (Mark 6:50). They saw it so they could know His almighty care. They saw so we could know it as well.

Mark's narrative has another unique detail. He tells us that Jesus was intending to pass by them (Mark 6:48). This paints a picture. Jesus was walking on the Sea coming near to them just

to check on them. He was watching over them. He was doing this in His almighty care for them. If Jesus had just been God the Son, then they would not have seen Him doing this. Since He is also true Man, they saw Him.

But when they saw Him, what they saw frightened them, because they did not yet understand Him (Mark 6:52).

With these things we are seeing the wonderful mystery and grace of who Jesus Christ is for us, as He comes to them walking on the water. In a very important respect, Jesus was just being Himself. Though we could also say, that in a very important respect, He was not being Himself.

He was not being Himself in the sense that they saw a real man walking on water. Human beings don't walk on water. So they saw Him doing this and reached a conclusion, a false conclusion; but it was a conclusion that seemed apparent to them. It was a ghost, an apparition. It was an evil spirit come to frighten them and maybe even harm them. It was an evil spirit playing tricks on their sight, looking like a man. So they are afraid. They cry out in fear (Mark 6:49-50).

So Jesus had to speak to them. Take heart. It is I. Don't be afraid (Mark 6:50).

But in what respect was Jesus being Himself? He was watching over them, and coming to them. But coming to them, how? In what capacity was He doing this? The answer: He was with them as God was with them.

I am thinking here of the words from Psalm 139, vv. 7-12.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

King David, who wrote this Psalm, is speaking to the LORD here. David continues,

If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me.

Were not the disciples dwelling in the uttermost parts of the sea? Were they not there on "the wings of the morning?" God was there. God the Son was there, in His nature as God. David continues,

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light about me be night,"

even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is bright as the day,

for darkness is as light with you.

Were not the disciples in the darkness on the Sea? And yet Jesus knows where they are.

So when He comes to them on the Sea, He is being Himself as the one who leads them in the uttermost parts of the Sea as the right hand of the LORD. He is being Himself as He is there present with them in the darkness, seeing them as if the darkness were light; seeing them as the LORD sees them in eternal day. He was being Himself as the LORD, the almighty, the Son of God, faithful and true.

And so you are in the day in Jesus, even if it seems like darkness all around.

But why then do they see Him as a man, walking on water? Here we come face-to-face with the mystery, wonder, and grace of who Jesus is. He is truly a man. He is truly God. Yet, one person, not two persons. One person, both true God and true Man.

So, wherever Jesus is, there the man is and there God the Son is. So Jesus is there in a way

that is fitting for being God, being there with them as God is with them; watching over them in the darkness. But since Jesus is one, where He was being there in a way that is fitting for being God the Son, there the man also was. So they see the man walking on the water. Jesus is being Himself as the almighty Son. They see Him walking on water because His human nature was also there. Jesus is One.

Does this mess with our categories? Sure does. So we bow the knees of our hearts and minds and worship Him and give thanks.

We also worship because this is God's grace in so many ways. It is grace because seeing the man, understanding who He is, we have the assurance of God's presence with us in Him.

But there is also profound grace in another way? Where God the Son is, there Jesus in His humanity is always. We could think that God being God just doesn't understand what it is like to be human, in the sea, in the dark, straining hard at the oars with the wind against us.

But God knows and understands our experience because He entered into it, as a true human being. It is as the Spirit-inspired words of Hebrews tell us:

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . Therefore in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to aid those who are being tempted” (Heb. 3:10-11, 17-18 NKJV). Hebrews goes on to say: “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16 NKJV).

Yes indeed, when the man Jesus was nailed to that Roman cross, being innocent, yet punished, we also know who was there nailed to that cross, because Jesus walked on water. God the Son was there too. It was natural to Jesus as a man to be nailed to a cross. It was not natural to God the Son to be nailed there. Yet, because Jesus is One, God's Son was there, suffering, being punished; yes, making propitiation for our sins; paying the price in full. And so the price is paid in full; believe it.

And then on the third day, Jesus was Himself as God the Son, rising from the dead. This was not natural to His human nature. But since Jesus is One, He conquered death for us humans, because death could not hold Him. So God the Son in our humanity defeats and conquers death for us; we who need this victory.

So Jesus is there, walking on the water. They all saw Him. But since He was walking on water because the man is inseparable from God the Son, so God comes to us in His fullness in Christ in the man.

Mystery, yes. Wonder and awe, Yes. Grace and love of God, oh yes. And it means eternal redemption, and strength and hope for today, every day that is today, and everlasting joy and peace for you. Amen.