

Our text for this morning's sermon is the assigned Gospel reading for today, Mark 6:45-56. You may have noticed that all of our Gospel readings this summer up to this point have come from the Gospel according to St. Mark. And as we travel through these stories from the Bible's second Gospel, there are certainly moments when we'd like to give the disciples a hard time. What I mean is, these twelve closest followers of Jesus, who were blessed to be the ones to walk with, talk with, and hang out with the very Son of God, sometimes just didn't get who He really was. In fact, Jesus was even known to call them "dull" from time to time. In our way of talking today we might say that when it came to understanding Jesus' identity, the disciples were just plain clueless! Our Gospel lesson today is just such an occasion.

Now, to be fair, *we* weren't with the disciples as they journeyed with Jesus, so it's hard for us to know all what they were truly going through as they heard the things Jesus said and saw the things Jesus did. But what *is* recorded for us in God's Holy Word, seems to be many of the teachable moments for the disciples, and most of those moments are not very flattering.

Our critique of the disciples in today's text centers on how they didn't know it was Jesus who was walking to them on the water. They seem to have a short-term memory problem. After all it was just a few weeks ago when, in Mark 4, we heard that Jesus was sleeping soundly on a cushion in a boat as a great storm arose. HE awoke and stilled the storm with a command. How could they have forgotten so quickly about *that* event? And today, as Jesus climbs into the boat with them, it says that the disciples were utterly astounded because they had forgotten what happened in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Why in the world were the disciples afraid, thinking Jesus was a ghost? What was so hard about all of this?

2. Well, like most situations, hindsight is 20/20. We think things should be pretty obvious to the disciples because *we* already know how everything ends. The disciples were in the middle of things and could only go by what they *thought* they knew and what they were seeing and still ...they didn't get it. They *will* eventually. Peter in Mark 8:27, will confess: "You are the Christ., but they didn't understand it yet. So put yourself in their sandals for just a minute. Or better yet, take a look at yourself, because our response to similar life situations is often no different from those clueless disciples: we sometimes fail to see clearly or understand fully.

Our Gospel today shows us the strains and pains God's people were experiencing, both the disciples and the crowds on Gennesaret's shore. As the

disciples were on the sea, the text says, they were making headway ***painfully, straining*** against the heavy winds. Make no mistake about it: this was not just a tough sail for them; this was ***hard work***. It was late, they were tired, and there was a real fear on their part that they might not make it across safely. These disciples are getting nowhere fast, and it's a strain to make any headway at all.

With Jesus' help, the disciples land on the other side of the sea, where Jesus encounters the second group of people today. Our Lord's fame had spread throughout the region, so when people recognized Him, they brought to Him their sick and lame. All of them who felt the pains of life were healed by Jesus, even if all they were able to do was grab hold of the fringe of His garment. For the disciples and for the people, there was only one thing that could help as they experienced the strains and pains of this mortal life: the presence of Jesus.

It's the presence of Jesus that helps us today as ***we*** go through the strains and pains brought about as the effects of sin in this world. If we look at our lives as a whole, most of us would probably agree that they're filled with many blessings from God. We have family and friends to share our lives; we are blessed with jobs and opportunities to use our gifts in service to our neighbor; we have a place to live and food to eat and many other what we call First Article gifts –physical blessings- from our Creator. We can even get to a point in life where it feels as if we're riding the wave comfortably and can simply enjoy all that God provides.

But, there are moments where the wind picks up: we get in a fight with someone we love, our job becomes a dreadful burden or is taken from us, the joys of homeownership overwhelm us, or our very lives seem to be in jeopardy. Like the disciples, we find that the days become long and we're tired; we're lonely. We're making headway in life ***painfully***.

As people of God, our faith ***knows*** where we can turn for help in these times, but as sinful people, we often don't do it. We tell ourselves that ***painful*** headway is ***still*** headway, that we can do it ourselves, and even if Jesus factors into things, we often see Him as the disciples did: like a ghost and not really there. In fact, we do this so often that we begin to think this is just how things are in life.

When life becomes work, when hardships overwhelm us, when suffering enters our life, we have a tendency to close up, to isolate ourselves, and to just want to be alone in the strains and pains of our misery. As people of faith, we ought to know this isn't the way things are intended to be for us, that we are

never alone, that we know where we can turn to find divine help, and yet so many times our life looks so much different. An outsider looking at our life might sometimes think, “How can you not get it? How can you not see where your help is? Why have you not learned by now that Jesus is always with you?”

1. But it was the presence of Jesus that brought calm amid wind and waves. It was the presence of Jesus that brought healing to the sick and infirm. It is the presence of Jesus that comforts us and joins us to His help and healing and life through forgiveness and grace.

From the moment of your Baptism, the Lord’s promise is that He will never leave you or forsake you. He continues to make His presence known to you as you receive His forgiving word of absolution, as you are reminded of His promises revealed in His Holy Word, and as you have His very life placed into your mouth in the Lord’s Supper. He makes His presence known to you as He daily gives all that you need. In turn the loving presence of Jesus is shared by you as you bring works of mercy to others. In all times and in every circumstance, Jesus is there: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

In fact, Jesus is not just *present* with you. He has *borne* the burden of the *strain* and *pain* of sin for you. He knows the heartache and hurt that you experience. He has died for you on the cross and has risen from the grave to give you the eternal *gains* of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50). These are powerfully comforting words from our Savior today, for the strains and pains of life are sure to come, but as a child of God, you know where you can turn for help in your time of need.

Look to Jesus. He is there. He steps into the boat with *you* to bring an end to *your* strains; He brings His healing touch to you for all your pains of body and soul; He has gained for you the kingdom and promises you life with Him eternally. Just as He promised, Jesus is always with us, especially in our strains and pains, to secure for us amazing and eternal gains. Amen.