

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:45-52

"Let Him In"

We have just finished a marvelous week of our vacation Bible school for adults and kids, - all ages and we had a lot of fun learning from each other. We were blessed by the video series, "The Chosen." It was so well received that those who were present have asked me to continue the series when we resume our Wednesday Night's after Labor Day. It has most certainly given many insight into life in the first century, and the lives of the apostles. It was a most successful VBS – well attended. I feel sorry for those who missed it!

Last Sunday's Holy Gospel was the feeding of the five thousand men, (and then the women and children) and it sets the stage for this week. Jesus is needing to rest and spend time alone with the Father, sending the apostles onto the boat for them to head north to Bethsaida.

Please notice the first word of today's Gospel from Mark – "*immediately*", εὐθέως (euthéōs), which gives us a real sense of urgency. Something took place before, it was the feeding of the multitude and now Jesus wanted to care for His apostles, and sent them on the boat because the crowd was getting a little unruly. In the time of Jesus – the crowd that He fed was in the thousands – and they all wanted to have some time with Jesus. Can you just imagine a crowd that large wanting a piece of you? Amazing and also pretty scary!

We get some insight into what Jesus must have sensed from that crowd, with the rising tide of emotion, since we are told that "*Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd.*" (Mark 6:45) He was on the Western side or the Jewish side of the Lake, in the southern portion, and headed to Bethsaida in the north. Things were starting to build to a fever pitch and the people were looking to make Jesus their King. They were not going to wait – they wanted it right now – but it wasn't time yet. You have to remember what the leadership was like: Religious and political leaders literally belonged to the Romans – both Herod and the high priests were in Rome's pockets! John's account of this incident paints a very clear picture of the atmosphere. "*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*" (John 6:15) No wonder Jesus sent the disciples away, and no wonder He wanted to have some time with the Father, and no wonder He did it *immediately*!

They were on one side of the Sea of Galilee and were going to head northwest to Bethsaida, which means "house of fishing." Bethsaida is not far from Capernaum, where Peter's wife and mother-in-law lives. There are times when the Sea of Galilee can be as smooth as a sheet of glass, but it can get pretty windy and that is putting it mildly.

It was not unusual for the disciples to be out on the lake at night, and they fished all night several times. Fish were attracted to the light – and there are Gospel accounts in Luke and John when the fished all night and caught nothing. On this night, the wind must have been pretty strong because Jesus "*saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake.*"

He was about to pass by them." (Mark 6:48) The night was divided by the Romans into four segments of three hours in length. The fourth watch was between three and six in the morning – the fourth watch, and the Gospel of John says that they had only rowed about "*three or three and a half miles.*" (John 6:19) They were really struggling! It is between three and six in the morning – they have been put there all night and they have only gone three and a half miles. Talk about a struggle! They had apparently taken down the sails and were using the oars to try to get some kind of control of the boat. Jesus sets out waking toward them. Now remember, Jesus isn't just walking on the water – like that is an everyday occurrence – but He walked the three or three and a half miles to catch up with them! The Gospel says that Jesus "*was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'*" (Mark 6:48-50)

Mark's Gospel is straight from the eyewitness of the Apostle Peter. Peter told this account to John Mark, his friend, what took place. John Mark is the author of Mark's Gospel. Many look at the phrase "*He was about to pass by them*" as an indication that Jesus was heading on without them – but I believe that we are given some more clarity which further confirms the power, compassion and identity of Jesus Christ being not only the Messiah, but God Himself. We have heard this phrase of "pass by" before: once with Moses and once with the Prophet Elijah. Once again Jesus refers to the "Law" (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) without even saying a word, much like He did on the mount of Transfiguration. In Exodus 33, when God allows Moses to witness His presence saying: "*I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,*" he said, "*you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*" Then the LORD said, "*There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.*" (Exodus 33:19-22) Jesus, who is God in the flesh, is 'passing by' His twelve – after they witnessed His compassion in feeding the five thousand.

Elijah went to the mountain awaiting God's voice: "*The LORD said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.'*" Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" (1Kings 19:11-13) Elijah witnessed the presence of God in the "*still small voice.*"

On the Sea of Galilee, the disciples see Jesus, but they think He is a ghost and they are terrified. Jesus compassionately calls out to them identifying Himself. Three of the Gospels, (Mark 6, John 6, and Matthew 14) give the same account that Jesus tells these screaming men to take courage and not be afraid – saying, "*It is I.*"

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In their time of desperate need – “*I Am*”, the GREAT I AM, came to their aid! The Son of God – Jesus of Nazareth got into the boat and they were amazed! After everything else that they had witnessed – they still were not getting it! It would not be until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would open their minds. The Gospel says, “*Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.*” (Mark 6:51-52) They had witnessed five thousand or more people being fed with just five loaves and two fish; they themselves went out two by two and healed people; they were driving out demons; and they heard every word that Jesus taught – but yet they really were not sure of what they were really witnessing. They were still spiritually blind because of their lack of paying attention to what God was doing right in front of them. Let’s face it - their minds were dull.

How many times have you heard me pray a prayer, including today, at the beginning of a sermon asking for God to “*open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds to hear the message You have given us?*” The disciples could not know Jesus as God, until it was revealed to them – by the Holy Spirit. They could not understand the meaning of all of the signs and miracles until they could truly know the God that created those miracles.

How much has Jesus been doing in our own lives that we have not recognized, or have not seen? How many miracles have happened that we didn’t recognized because we were too busy or distracted to see what God was really doing? Are we spiritually blind? Can we see God at work in our midst, or do we count it all as circumstantial? I believe that there are no such things as coincidences! I like to call them “God-incidences.” Be grateful for this gift from God.

In closing, do you really know Jesus – or do you just know of Him? Do you have a relationship with Jesus, or do you worship Him from a distance, maybe afraid to ask Him to come to you? If you need Jesus to calm your storms today – just call on Him – let Him into your boat. Let the Holy Spirit give you the peace that passes all understanding, so you too can see and know Jesus as He really is – the Living Son of God, who loves you and wants to come to you. He not only wants to get into your boat – but He wants you to let Him into your heart as well. I pray that you would know Jesus as He wants you to know Him.