

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, July 29, 2018, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 6:45-52

***"Don't Pass Me By"***

What is so very remarkable about the Gospels is that we get to see first-hand some of the powerful miracles by Jesus, through His love and compassion for His people. We see that Jesus' miracles were over nature, over illness and disease, over matter, over evil – and He was empowering His disciples to do the very same thing. I want to remind you again that these people live in a time where there was questionable leadership, both in government and religious leaders. There was tragedy, there was a lack of faith, but on the other hand there were also miracles and signs of hope.

We get a chance to see how the people are reacting to Jesus' miracles and to His teaching. Remember the crowd running to catch up with the boat as the disciples were trying to get some "alone time with Jesus?" After feeding all of those people - things were building up and the crowd wanted more and more of Jesus and His disciples. Notice the first word of today's Gospel from Mark – "*immediately*" which gives us a real sense of urgency. In the time of Jesus – the crowd that He fed was in the thousands – at least five and more like ten thousand plus as you look at families. Can you just imagine a crowd that large wanting a piece of you? Amazing and 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) Things were starting to build to an incredible crescendo and the people were looking to make Jesus their King. They were not going to wait – they wanted it right now – and 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." Did you know that? In Hebrew – Beth or Bet means "house of." Jesus was born in Bet-lechem (Bethlehem) or the "house of bread." Ironically, the "bread of life" was born in the "House of bread." Bethsaida is not far from Capernaum, where Peter's mother-in-law lives. You need to know that there are times when the Sea of Galilee can be absolutely magnificent like a sheet of glass. I go back there in my mind all the time; we were just there four years ago before visiting St. Andrew's for the first time. While I go back there in my mind I am reminded that it can whip up like the dickens. I lost a hat to the Sea of Galilee and the winds. I will never see that Israeli army hat again! That is OK – I don't need it. It can get pretty wild and blow up pretty weird.

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It was not at all unusual for the disciples to be out on the lake at night. They fished all night several times – fish were attracted to the light. In Luke 5:5 and in John chapter 21 – there are accounts when after fishing all night and catching nothing – Jesus told them to go back out and lower their nets. 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. 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! Wow, there is a lot going on here! The Scriptures are coming to life right before them, and us too, showing Jesus’ true identity and His real power. Like from Job: “*He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.*” (Job 9:8) From Isaiah: “*I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.*” *This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters.*” (Isaiah 43:15-16)

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 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 instead 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. Listen to God’s words to Moses 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 – God Incarnate, 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."

The disciples see Jesus, but they think He is a ghost, and they become even more terrified. Jesus compassionately cries out to them who He really is. All three 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 – and He says "*It is I.*" The literal reading is "I am" or in Greek "*ego eimi*" (ἐγώ εἰμι). It is the same as saying "*the I Am is here*" or "*I, Yahweh, am here.*" We learn God's identity in Exodus 3:14 in response to Moses' question about who should he say is sending him. The Lord said "*I AM WHO I AM.*" Then second, the Prophet Isaiah gives us these words from God: "*Who has performed and accomplished it, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.*" (Isaiah 41:4) God also confirms this in Isaiah 43:10, 51:12, and 52:6. Are you taking note? (It will be online later in the week.)

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! Let's face 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 of us have driven in a bad fog – it is scary isn't it – you cannot see in front of you and you don't have fog lights, as if there were a veil over our eyes. How can anyone who has witnessed, first hand, the feeding of these many thousands, along with Jesus walking on the water, and His calming the stormy seas, and all of the healings - still not know who Jesus truly was?

How many times have you heard me pray a prayer 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.

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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 recognize 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."

Just think about this morning when I gave the announcement about what has taken place in the lives of some of our parishioners and how God has healed them. The didn't heal themselves; I didn't heal them. We prayed for them, but God, the merciful, the Creator, the Lord – healed those people. And they have a story to tell.

So, are you fearful of the storms of your life? Do you feel like you are about to go under for the last time? Do you see Jesus afar off – in a distance, but He just doesn't seem to come your way? You feel that He might "pass by you?" Please ask God for Him to give you eyes to see Him as He really is. Ask Him - so that you would recognize His hand at work in your life.

Here is an important self-examination: do you really know Jesus – or do you just know of Him? Do you have a relationship with Jesus, or is He far off and you worship Him and love Him there - from a distance, but you are afraid to ask Him to come here, or here? If you need Jesus to calm your storms today – just call on Him. How often have I told you about a three-word prayer? Help ME Jesus! A little over a week ago, a lady came into my office, who I told you about earlier – and she said that she could not sleep. She was scared, and she made it a four-word prayer. She prayed "please, help me Jesus." She prayed this over and over and over again, until she fell asleep. And you know what her prayer was this past Wednesday when she told me she had no cancer? She said another three-word prayer: "Thank you Jesus!" You see, Jesus already sees and knows your need and He's already coming to you. Call out to Him and let Him speak peace into your heart and your life. He loves you that much! Then 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. Jesus loves you and He 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.