**It is I. Don’t be afraid**

Mark 6:45-56

Key Verse: 6:50b “Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Through the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand we learned that Jesus is the good shepherd who feeds his hungry sheep. Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. In today’s passage Jesus saves his disciples in the middle of a storm. Jesus is the good shepherd and the wonderful savior. Let’s see how Jesus saved his disciples in the middle of the storm.

First, Jesus prayed. (45-46) What did Jesus do after he fed the crowd? He went up to a mountain to pray. Look at verses 45-46. “***Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray***.” Jesus knew that his disciples’ vacation was ruined because of the crowd. So, he sent the disciples ahead of him to Bethsaida, a small town on the northeastern side of Galilee. Then he went up to a mountain to pray. Why did Jesus go up on a mountain to pray so often? What was he supposed to pray for? Prayer is communication with God. Through prayer Jesus talked with the Father God and listened to Him. Jesus sought the Father’s will, and he found the answer and direction for his ministry. He also prayed for his disciples and the crowd. The more the darkness of this world deepens, the more we have to pray. The more we are in trouble, the more we have to pray. When we pray, we know God’s will even in times of trouble. When we pray, God provides a way out. For this reason, Jesus spent most of his personal time praying. Are you currently experiencing troubles? Go to a solitary place and pray. Do you have problems which burden your heart and entangle your life? Humbly kneel down before God and pray.

Second, Jesus walks on the water. (47-50a) As we know, life does not always go as we expect. The disciples' lives were the same. Later that night, their boat was in the middle of a lake, while Jesus was alone on land. **He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them**. (47-48a) The Lake Galilee is 8 miles long and 4 miles wide, and their boat was in the middle of it. The lake was located 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by mountains. When the cold air blown from the mountains clashes with the warm air on the lake, sudden and violent storms may occur. The disciples’ boat was stuck in the middle of the lake because the wind was blowing against them. We are often situated in troubled times like the disciples who were stuck in the middle of a problem. The wind seems to blow against us from all directions. The disciples did not know what to do. We also don’t know what to do and how to get out of our problems. In chapter 4, Jesus calmed the storm while they were crossing the lake. At that time, they were saved because Jesus was with them and calmed the storm. But this time, there was no Jesus with them. They were alone all by themselves in the middle of the lake on a dark night. But they were not truly alone, because Jesus was watching over them. Verse 48 says that Jesus saw his disciples straining at the oars. Jesus was on land, far away, more than two miles away, from the disciples. It was a dark night shortly before dawn, around 3 am. It was impossible for a mere man to see the disciples in the middle of the dark lake. But Jesus saw his disciples because he had compassion for them. Jesus saw his disciples struggling against the storm. Jesus knew that they were in trouble and that they needed help. In the same way, Jesus knows our struggles. Jesus watches over our situations. Sometimes we feel like we are all alone in the middle of a storm. Some may think that God doesn’t know us and doesn’t care for us. This is not true! Jesus knows our problems and watches over us.

Look at verses 48b. “***Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them***.” Jesus went to rescue them by walking on the lake. Jesus didn’t take a boat, but walked on the water. This shows the imminence and urgency of Jesus’ rescue. Jesus didn’t calculate whether they needed more time for disciplining or not. He immediately ran to them by walking on the water. Here we learn that Jesus is the good shepherd who cares us in the time of need. We also learn that Jesus is the mighty God who works beyond human reason, experience, and common sense. Who can walk on water but God alone? This is the same statement as “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (2:7) Jesus has authority not only to forgive sins, but also to walk on the water because he is God himself.

Jesus was about to pass by them to quell his disciple’s fears. But they were afraid regardless. **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.** (49-50a) They never thought nobody but a ghost could walk on water. They cried out when they imagined that they were going to be devoured by the ghost. Like the disciples, we often don’t realize the presence of God in our storms because of fear. Fear makes people spiritually blind. I heard that a fearful man was afraid of his own shadow that always followed him. When he was filled with fear, even his own shadow looked like a thief. Fear makes people anxious, jealous, and doubtful. Remember that God did not give us the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Ti 1:7) Amen! How did Jesus help his fearful disciples?

Third, It is I. Don’t be afraid. (50b-52) Read verse 50b. When his disciples were filled with the fear of a ghost, Jesus immediately spoke to them and said, ***“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*** It was like a lovely mother’s voice for her fearful baby, “It’s me, sweetie. It’s mom!” As soon as the baby hears her mother’s voice, she suddenly stops crying because she feels safe and secure. Jesus meant, “Don’t be afraid, it is not a ghost. It’s I, your master and teacher, Jesus of Nazareth!” It was crucial when his disciples heard the voice of Jesus in the middle of storms. It is very important for us to hear the word of God in times of need. Jesus said that whoever hears my voice will cross from death to life. (Jn 5:24) Do not hear others' voices in times of storm, but Jesus alone. People often say discouraging and fearful things such as, “You are now in trouble!” “Repent of your sins!” But we must hear the voice of Jesus, “Take courage! It’s I. Don’t be afraid.” Amen!

I was encouraged by Kit West who said that he is memorizing the entirety of Philippians this year. Last year he did so with Colossians. Memorizing Bible verses is an act of hearing God’s word. In the time of our need God speaks his message through the Bible verses we remember. One of our members confessed that he was encouraged by the word of Jesus, “Don’t be afraid! Just believe”. Like him we will be encouraged when we remember Jesus’ word in the time of trouble, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

In Matthew’s gospel 14:22-33 the same story is written, adding Peter’s walking on the water. At that time Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Jesus said, “Come.” Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. *“You of little faith*,” Jesus said, “*Why did you doubt*?” (Mt 14:22-31) When Peter heard Jesus’ voice and fixed his eyes on Jesus, he walked on the water. But when he saw the wind and doubted, he sank. When we fix our eyes on Jesus and stay tune to the word of Jesus, we experience miracles in the storms of our life.

Look at verse 51. “***Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed***.” When Jesus got into their boat, the wind died down. This was not a coincidence, but God’s providence. Jesus calmed the storm. He controlled the winds. In the same way during times of storms, invite Jesus into your boat. Then, the wind will die down. The storm will be controlled. Our life is like a voyage to heaven. We’ll meet many big or small storms of life. Invite Jesus into your boat until the storm calms down. Amen! The disciples did not understand what was going on. Verse 52 says that they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. This means that when the disciples did not remember how Jesus fed the five thousand by his mighty power, they still did not know who Jesus really was. Their hearts were hardened when they did not meet Jesus personally as the LORD and Savior.

Fourth, in all things God works for good (53-56) **When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed**. (53-56) In this way his disciples’ vacation was ruined again. Their original destination was Bethsaida, but their boat, because of the storm, arrived at Gennesaret, where the gentiles resided. They arrived in the wrong spot. But many sick people in that area got benefits from the disciples’ ruined retreat. Many people received healings from Jesus. Who knows what other benefits people may have received because of our sufferings? In fact, the people of this world received salvation because of Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. Jesus’ disciples sacrificed their vacation, but many people received healing and salvation in turn. Jesus might have taught this to his disciples. Sometimes, our boat may arrive at the place where we don’t expect or desire. We leave for Bethsaida, but may arrive at Gennesaret. But, take courage! Believe that in all things God works for good, sometimes for better.

There was a man who was stranded on a no-man’s island. He had to learn to survive on the island starting with fishing, hunting, planting, and even building a shelter. He learned how to make fire by rubbing dry wood. One day while he was fishing, a gale of fire was blown by the wind to his shelter which was then completely burned down. He was very frustrated and angered toward God. “God, you know how much I suffered for building this shelter, but you took it away in a second.” But soon he found that a big ship was approaching his island. The rescue ship was coming! The pilot said to him that they saw the big smoke from the island which they could locate. The fire which took away his shelter became the signal of S.O.S for this man. Like this man we often become frustrated when the wind blows against us, when our boats seem to go the other direction, when our shelter burns down. But remember that in all things, in all situations, and in all directions, God is working for the good for those who love him. Amen! The wind will become the power of the Holy Spirit. The fire will be the sign of salvation. The shelter will become our paradise. Let us read verse 50b. “*Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.*” Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and stay tune Jesus’ words! Amen!