

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 23 May 2021
Mark 6:45-56 - Jesus Walks on Water

We're continuing our series in Mark's Gospel, asking ourselves the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" And what difference does who he is make to your life? We read today from Mark 6:45-56.

[Read Mark 6:45-56]

Jesus Walks on the Water

⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ 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.

[Prayer]

Miracles were a constant theme in Jesus' ministry. So far in the series we have heard of some pretty amazing things: multiple healings including healing from leprosy, paralysis, fever and various diseases, we have seen people set free from demon possession, the calming of a storm by a simple command, a child raised from the dead, the feeding of five thousand and as we just read Jesus walking on water and calming the winds.

Can you stop for a second and imagine being a witness to just one of these miracles? Imagine the intensity of emotions: the amazement, the excitement, the inability to fully process or make sense of what you would have seen. Imagine if you had a front row seat to all of these events as the disciples did.

There is no doubt, miracles were a major feature of Jesus' ministry, but why? What was the purpose of them?

Jesus was kind and compassionate and perhaps the miracles, particularly the physical and spiritual healings were his natural response to the human condition. We saw last week, in verse 34, that Jesus had compassion on the crowds as they were like sheep without a Shepherd. The fallen state of mankind means that sickness, death and poverty are constants and that mattered to Jesus. He was responding to the immediate needs of those he encountered because he had the power to make a difference, and he cared!

However, there is more to it than that. The miracles bare witness of who Jesus is, they were and remain evidence of his divinity. His ability to act outside the physical rules of nature pointed to his identity as the Son of God. Indeed, the miracles were a vital component in revealing to the disciples, and to the world, that he was the promised Messiah and it helped to challenge their understanding of the messiahship.

With this in mind, the response of the disciples to Jesus walking on water does raise some questions. As said before, they had a front row seat to all the miracles and if the miracles were continually pointing to Jesus as God, how could they be missing the point!

Note their response to Jesus' walking on the water...**they were terrified**, and note their response to Jesus calming of the wind...**they were completely amazed!** This is remarkable given this incident so closely mirrors a previous event recorded in Chapter 4 of Mark, which we examined a few weeks ago, where Jesus was sleeping on a boat and was awoken by **terrified** disciples who were **amazed** at his ability to calm the winds...we have seen this movie before.

Surely, the disciples already knew who Jesus was and what he could do, didn't they? Many of them in choosing to follow Jesus had already come to the conclusion that he was the messiah and declared it. Some of them had been disciples of John the Baptist and had left to follow Jesus after John's declaration that Jesus was the Lamb of God, the promised Messiah (John 1:35-50).

However, even John the Baptist had moments of doubt and a lack of full understanding of who Jesus was. In Matthew 11 we see where John, while imprisoned, sent word to Jesus to ask "Are you the One, or shall we look for someone else". Jesus' response is instructive "Go and report to John what you hear and see, the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them". Jesus in his response was drawing on old testament texts (particularly Isa 29:18, 35: 5-6 and 61: 1-2) that point to the miraculous works of the Messiah.

It was clear Jesus wasn't going to be the military leader some had envisaged the messiah to be, but that he had authority from beyond this world was without question on account of his teachings and his works. They pointed to him being Immanuel, God in the flesh, God with us.

Verse 52 of the reading indicates that the reason for the disciples' amazement was that they had not understood about the loves and that their hearts were hardened. The description of a hardened heart is often used in scripture to represent a heart that is rebellious towards God's will, but I don't think this is the intended meaning here. Rather, it points to the lack of spiritual awareness in the disciples. They knew, perhaps on an intellectual level that Jesus was the Messiah, but the reality of what that actually meant was lost on them. They lacked insight, despite their proximity to Jesus the penny hadn't dropped. Perhaps it was because they were in the thick of the action and the demands that came with supporting Jesus' ministry meant they hadn't stepped back to fully absorb all they were witnessing and experiencing, they couldn't see the wood for the trees so to speak.

Are we just like the disciples, do we act in a way which belies what we say we know of who Jesus is and our relationship to him? Has the penny well and truly dropped for us? Do we face the storms of life with the knowledge of who we serve and His ability to overcome all this world could throw at us?

Note, Jesus saw that “the disciples were straining at the oars, because the wind was against them”. He sees your plight; he knows of your difficulty and he is not going to leave you to fight on your own. He will come down into the midst of the storm.

Jesus went down to the lake and walked towards them on the water, the passage says he was about to pass them by. We don't know why he was going to pass them by, perhaps he wanted them to recognise him and call for help or maybe he was demonstrating that they could follow him to shore. It is hard to say, but what is clear is that the terrified reaction it prompted in the disciples was met by the reassuring words of Jesus, take courage it is I.

Taking courage is easy when we know who Jesus is and recognise what he did for us through his death and resurrection and when we don't lose sight of that gospel truth. We need not look further than our own lives to see his hand of grace and compassion at work throughout the years, the miraculous interventions, the healing, the blessings and the victories all pointing to who Jesus is. Jesus does not promise a life without trouble in fact quite the opposite, he challenges that anyone who follows him must be prepared to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. What he does promise is that he will always be with us and in him we will have all we will ever need.

The penny dropped for the disciples, perhaps not fully until the death and resurrection of Jesus and his promise of the Holy Spirit being fulfilled on that first Pentecost. My prayer for us today, this Pentecost Sunday, is that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, our eyes will be opened to who Jesus is and be so transformed by the knowledge of this truth.

Amen.