

Mark 6, 45-52

Wednesday 6th Jan 2021

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Immediately before our Gospel reading begins, Jesus has just fed the five thousand. He may have been feeling a little drained. In the English Standard version, we read “He made his disciples get into the boat” which implies they resisted obeying, not through disobedience or rebellion but I think they just wanted to stay close to Him. And Jesus needed a break.

So we can be sure Jesus struggled to get His alone time. He has dismissed the crowd, He sent them away, He has taken His leave of them, He took Himself away, and He set off up the mountain. In v. 47 we read “And when evening came..... He was alone.”

Implying that He wasn't alone till evening. The quiet prayer time Jesus craved did not come easily. If it was a struggle for Jesus, how much more can we expect it to be a struggle for us to set and maintain a regular prayer time.

I have the Daily Prayer app on my phone, and I thought it would be easy in the morning to turn my phone alarm off and click on the prayer app on while the phone is in my hand – what could be simpler?

Well, I finally managed to move the Facebook and the YouTube app from the same screen as the Daily Prayer app, otherwise I will spend an hour or more looking at the latest picture from the Hubble Space Telescope, the Aurora Borealis, or the most beautiful birds that we don't see in England. There is nothing wrong in looking at photos of the natural world, at the appropriate time. Where I was being spiritually careless was in realizing the nature of the distraction, and allowing it to continue for so long.

Now, we have left Jesus up a mountain, let's get back – no distractions! Jesus has finally managed to get some time alone with the Father, although physically separated by distance, Jesus is looking out for the boat with his disciples in and aware that they are in

difficulties. The Sea of Galilee is 696 feet below sea level, which results in violent downdraughts from the surrounding mountains and sudden windstorms. The disciples (some of whom had been fishermen) weren't enjoying a pleasant cruise. V. 48 tells us "About the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the Sea."

The fourth watch of the night is between 3.00 a.m. and 6.00 a.m., we know Jesus had a busy day feeding 5 thousand people, He struggled to get alone, at evening He climbed up a mountain, spent some time alone, saw his friends in difficulty, climbed down the mountain, and started walking on the water in the very early morning. Jesus' disciples certainly knew Him well, if not completely understanding the relevance of the actions He performed, and we might expect them to be relieved and comforted at the sight of Jesus walking on the water, instead, they thought He was a ghost, Verse 50 tells us "For they all saw Him and were terrified." Jesus is just as concerned for their emotional health as their physical well-being, so He re-assures them, "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid" We know Jesus wasn't educated at Eton, that "it is I" sounds out of place and terribly formal, as in "Knock knock" "Whose there?" "It is I" The Crossway Study Bible says that there are two equally valid translations of that sentence from the original Greek, one is "Take heart, it is I" which makes sense, the other translation is "I am" which reveals Jesus divinity, as God the Father says "I am who I am" when speaking with Moses in Exodus 3, v. 14. In Job ch 9, Job says it is God who "Trampled the waves of the Sea" which is another clue to the disciples of Jesus divine nature.

Jesus tells them not to be afraid, He gets into the boat with them, the winds cease and the disciples are utterly astounded, they are dumbfounded, they do not know what to make of the feeding of the five thousand, of Jesus walking on the water, and v. 52 tells us "their hearts were hardened." It sounds as if they are more confused at the end of the passage than the beginning. The disciples have been with Jesus constantly for months, yet this closeness hasn't turned them into spiritual giants with great knowledge and impressive abilities, they

are struggling. In Mark ch 4 v 38-41, Jesus calms a storm when they wake Him up and ask Him if He cares they are perishing, the disciples on that occasion struggled with their faith and their fear. Two chapters on and the disciples are struggling with their faith, their fear and the hardness of their hearts. Things have not got easier from being close to Jesus, and this shows us God moves in mysterious ways....

Humanly we would expect a measurable increase in the disciples' faith and understanding and we may expect this of ourselves after a number of years of faith and Church attendance, we may expect this of others who have been a Christian for longer than us, or who have a certain rank or title in the Church. When we read our Bibles, we know how the story ends, we realize the disciples eventually come to a full knowledge and faith in Christ, several are martyred, eleven of them have Churches named after them for the next two thousand years... what we see here is a snapshot of the disciple's spiritual development. Like their boat on the Sea of Galilee, it is not plain sailing!

We need to be aware of what is happening here, so that we don't fall into error and believe the Prosperity Gospel or similar that claims if we get close to Jesus everything in our lives is going to be wonderful, our loved ones will always be in excellent health, anxiety will be a distant memory and so on. It is a very good thing to have a relationship with Jesus, Isaiah Ch. 62 tells us "The Lord delights in you", it IS very comforting to realize that God promises in Deut 31, 6 that He will never fail or forsake us. God the Father and God the Son want to have a relationship with us, we are truly loved, we are securely loved by the Creator of the Universe. That's amazing.

We find many Bible references to God's provision for us, He tempers the winds to the shorn lamb, Psalm 6, His yoke is easy and His burden light, Matthew 11, 30.

And His yoke IS easy, but it doesn't automatically follow that our entire lives are going to be easy with guaranteed comfort. Jesus Himself entered into our humanity, lived in poverty and died in agony. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, Hebrews 12, 2 but none of His experiences were of themselves easy or

comfortable. Let us not fall into error through lack of knowledge and understanding.

Amen.