

"Take Courage! It is I"

Mark 6:45-56 (Key Verse: 6:50b)

But Jesus spoke up at once: "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."

We saw from last week's message how the disciples experienced the amazing work of God in feeding 5000 people from five loaves and two fish. However still, it seems they failed to see Jesus for who he really is, the Almighty God. Yet instead of a harsh rebuke, Jesus encourages them to take courage and not be afraid. This passage is firstly about, the glory of Jesus which had already started from the feeding of 5000 people with two fish and five loaves of bread. Secondly, the passage reveals what blocks us from seeing Jesus for who he truly is, the Almighty God. Failing to understand and know who Jesus is, results in a life ruled by fear. We get discouraged to live for God's redemptive mission work. When we face circumstances that are different from our expectations, we easily pull back in fear and discouragement. Jesus knows us and will continue to reveal himself to us in various ways so we may grow in knowing that he is the almighty God, "It is I" as if to say, I am He. It is my prayer that we are encouraged through this passage. In spite of so many times we find our hearts proving stubborn and sinful. May the Lord continue to open our eyes and hearts to grow in seeing Jesus for who he truly is. Amen!

At this point after the feeding of the 5000 people, Jesus knew that his disciples were extremely tired. And so he immediately instructed his disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd [45]. Verse 46, says *"After bidding them farewell, He went up on the mountain to pray."* It's amazing that in all the places that describe Jesus praying, he is always alone. The day before he chose the twelve, Jesus went up a mountain alone and prayed all night (Luke 6:12). When his crucifixion was close, Jesus prayed by himself (Matt 23:6). It is also clear that when Jesus goes to pray in solitary places, there is always an important thing he is about to do. In this case he was about to reveal yet again who he was to the disciples.

Look at verse 47-48, *"When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and Jesus was alone on land. 48 He could see that the disciples were straining to row, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea. He intended to pass by them,"* The disciples were struggling to row to the other side because the wind was against them. No matter how much they tried they could not move beyond the middle of the river. Jesus could see this even though they were not aware. About the fourth watch of the night, which is assumed to be 3a.m in the morning, Jesus went out towards them walking on water. Something to pay special attention to is the last part of verse 48, it reads, **"...Jesus went out to them walking on the sea. He intended to pass by them."** Firstly, Jesus went out to them not on another boat, but walked on water. Secondly, while walking to them Jesus intended to pass by them. Question is why would the Bible tell us **Jesus was intending to pass by them** when he started walking on water.

Let us try and use the other parts of the Bible to perhaps try interpret this. There is a story of Elijah in the Old Testament, where he feels lonely, Jezebel one of the king's women is looking to kill him and all the prophets of God are killed. To describe his heart situation let me read, 1 Kings 19:4, *"4 while he himself travelled on a day's journey into the wilderness. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers."* And so his life was in danger. He felt he was the only one left who believed in God. Let us continue on 1 Kings 19:9-18 to see some of the similarities between what the disciples were facing and Elijah, more so how this reveals who Jesus is. Let me read from 1 Kings 19:9-18,

"9 There Elijah entered a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of Hosts," he replied, "but the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left, and they are seeking my life as well."

11Then the LORD said, **“Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD. Behold, the LORD is about to pass by.”** And a great and mighty wind tore into the mountains 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. 12After the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.

And after the fire came a still, small voice. 13When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him and said, **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

14“*I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of Hosts,”* he replied, *“but the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left, and they are seeking my life as well.”*

15Then the LORD said to him, *“Go back by the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. 16You are also to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah to succeed you as prophet.*

17Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu.” 18Nevertheless, **I have reserved seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.**”

Just like the disciples, Elijah was scared for his life, however as we read in verse 11b, **“behold the Lord is about to pass by.”** Similarly with the disciples being stranded in the middle of the lake, **Jesus had planned to pass by them.** Right here we can see yet again Jesus revealing who he really is. He is the same God who spoke to Elijah. He did not come to Elijah in the form of great and mighty wind that tore into the mountains, he did not come in the form of the earthquake and he definitely also did not come to Elijah in the form of fire. Rather through a still, small voice the lord came to Elijah. As Jesus had done in Elijah’s days, he too came to pass by the disciples.

Look at verse 49, “but when they saw Him walking on the sea, they cried out, thinking He was a ghost— 50for they all saw Him and were terrified. But Jesus spoke up at once: **“Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.”** It was only when they cried out and showed their terror that Jesus with a still voice spoke to them. **Take courage it is It, do not be afraid.** The wording, **“It is I”** is similar to how God in the old testament would say, **I am who I am.** I am He. Which means God is eternal, uncreated, has no beginning and has no end and has absolute existence. This nicely links to the Hebrew name, Yahweh. In other words Jesus is the almighty God.

God reveals to Elijah that he is not the only one left who is a true believer. But rather, there are reserved seven thousand in Israel all whose knees have not bowed to Baal and whose mouth have not kissed him. In the midst of Elijah’s terror, the lord instructs Elijah to go back. He was to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. He was to also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel...then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu. Even though Elijah was in the mist of terror, wanting his life to end, the Lord was still in control. Because God is almighty there is nothing that is bigger or mightier than Him.

Just like in Elijah’s terror situation, what the lord said brought encouragement. It was not all gloomy and terrible after all. There was a remnant of Israel that had not bowed to Baal. This should have been so encouraging to Elijah, to know that he was not alone. But that there was a body of believers just they were not on sight. Jesus, our creator God, has remained the same, yesterday today and forever, at the cry of the disciples Jesus gives them words of encouragement. **Don’t be afraid, it is I.**

Look at verse 51, “Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. And the disciples were utterly astounded,” When Jesus climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Jesus just like with Elijah calmed the situation. Though Elijah and the disciples in their desperate and life threatening situation, God was there, not far, our Lord Jesus is always passing by. We may

not recognize that God is around us, not far off in our situations. And when we cry out, he does not waste any time, but he comes. He comes and calms everything down because Jesus is our almighty God. He could walk on the water, in fact in Job 9:8 while talking about God, says, "He alone stretches out the heavens and **treads on the waves of the sea.**" It is God who can walk on the waves of the sea, it is God who can walk on water. Jesus had just fed the 5000 people from two fish and five loaves of bread, and now he walked on water and calmed the strong wind. In spite of all this evidence before the disciples, they still could not see who Jesus was, let us see why.

Look at verse 52, "for they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts had been hardened." The disciples were supposed to have understood who Jesus was from the loaves. However, they failed to understand. The reason was because, their hearts had been hardened. Now what can harden our hearts, seems the predominant cause is sin. When we find ourselves casually falling into sin. As we learned in the book of 1 John, being a Christian does not mean we do not sin, however it does mean we detest our sin and sinful behaviour and at some point repent before God. How come then do we still find ourselves sinning? First it's because though we are saved through the blood of Jesus, we still live in our sinful body. Secondly, we still find ourselves falling into sin because we have not fully grasped who Jesus is. We may have some good head knowledge about Jesus and some convictions within our faith from the word of God. However, the more we grow in knowing Jesus the more we start overcoming certain sinful behaviours in our lives. And this is the amazing grace of God over us. Though he tends to reveal who he is, he does not judge us based on the fact that we saw 5000 people being fed almost out of nothing, or the fact that he could calm the winds and walk on water. Jesus comes and says, "**Take courage, it is I.**" I believe he is gradually revealing himself in our lives, as we diligently study his word and through life circumstances. And the more we grow in knowing him and understanding, the more we would grow in detesting to commit sin. As God convicts us in our hearts with his word, the more we grow courageous to live for the will of God. It is the more we will be encouraged by the presence of Jesus in our lives. Jesus presence and his words will become our strong encouragement to live by faith.

The last part of this passage reveals how the presence of Jesus and those who understood who he was, could experience the power of God. They could see the glory of God. Jesus and the disciples had crossed over to the Gennesaret and moored the boat [53]. Look at verse 54-56, "As soon as they got out of the boat, the people recognized Jesus and ran through that whole region, carrying the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. 56 And wherever He went—villages and towns and countryside—they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him just to let them touch the fringe of His cloak. And all who touched Him were healed." There was clear evidence of the work of God in Gennesaret because there was faith on the true person of Jesus Christ.

I just want to share a small realization while preparing this message. It is this grace of God. I always understood that I am saved by God's grace. That the punishment I deserved for my sin Jesus bore it for me. However, I am realizing that actually God does not treat us according to what he has revealed to us. Example is the disciples, they have so many things done by Jesus, yet still they failed to understand the loaves of bread. And they fail to understand because of stubborn hearts. Yet Jesus encourages them not to be afraid, that he is with them. This is the amazing grace of God that he has bestowed upon me. It is like God is patient with me to know him, for if God was to judge me by what he has done for me, I would be a dead man. And so this is a grace I was never aware of. I can sense that it is a grace that will help me to show grace towards others. Because a number of times I find that I can be so harsh. Judging people or having an expectation from people based on what I have showed them or what I have told them. Jesus is not like that, he is patient and kind to walk with me gradually towards knowing him and being convicted by his word. Amen!

In conclusion, in this passage is revealed the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the almighty God, who could feed the 5000 people with fish and loaves of bread. Jesus was graceful to his disciples even though they failed to understand the meaning of the loaves. They failed to see and understand that Jesus is the almighty God. We also learned that, we fail to understand because our hearts are stubborn. However, today's passage reveals God's grace even though we have stubborn hearts, Jesus still comes to encourage us. Not to be fearful but to genuinely live a life of faith because he is the almighty God. I pray we may not live lives that makes our hearts stubborn to the word of God, but that God's word may convict us to be men and women who know Jesus. May Jesus be our strength to follow him for the glory of God. Amen!