

SERMON JULY 28, 2024 “Jesus Goes First, Faith that Endures.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Christ Jesus, last week we saw how our Lord had just fed over 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

But though the disciples had only a minuscule amount of food, Jesus fed them all, and there were even leftovers.

While Jesus dismisses the crowds to return to their homes, another challenge awaits the disciples.

Jesus sends them on ahead across the Sea of Galilee while He goes off to pray. He will meet them on the other side, but for now, He needs time with His Father to pray.

And as you heard, a storm came up. The twelve weren't afraid of the storm - they *were* making slow headway, so slowly that Jesus could catch up with them.

That's when you know you're slow, right? When you're in a traffic jam, and bicyclists start passing you by!

So it was that night on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had caught up to them, and - ***Jesus meant to pass them by.***

Jesus wasn't coming out to help or get into the boat with them. ***He meant to pass them by.***

Perhaps you've felt that way a time or two in your life, that Jesus was passing you by just when you needed Him to stop and help you through some storm or difficulty.

Worse, it seems Jesus **wanted them** to see Him passing them by since He was passing close enough to be seen by them.

Close enough that when He speaks, He is heard by them.

Close enough to get into the boat when they cry out in fear.

Please note: Jesus didn't have to pass by that closely; He could have gotten to the other side without them seeing Him. This suggests there must have been some purpose for Jesus to do that—something He wanted to teach them and us.

I submit to you the lesson was that **Jesus goes first.**

Even though He had remained behind to pray, Jesus was going to be there for his disciples when they arrived.

Jesus goes first. He leads, He directs, and we follow.

And so wherever you go in life, whatever you face, Jesus will be there. You do not have to wonder *if* He is going to arrive. ***Jesus goes first.***

And this is true even when the journey before you is death. ***Jesus goes first.***

Remember what Jesus told His disciples right before His crucifixion? **I am going to prepare a place for you.**

He goes before us through His death to resurrection to prepare the way and bring us along with Him.

So you will not face the day of your death alone. ***Jesus goes first.***

He is the Lord of creation and the Lord of life. The Lord of your life. When you die and when you rise, O child of God, Jesus will be there. With you.

The disciples should have been full of confidence since they'd just seen Jesus feed all those people, but they aren't.

Mark tells us that they were ***terrified***. Not by the storm - they were handling that okay. They were terrified because when they saw Jesus, **they thought they saw a ghost**.

Now it's easy for us to criticize the disciples here. But before you jump on that bandwagon, think about what rocks your boat and causes you panic and fear.

What *spooks* you and causes you to panic, disbelieve, and doubt God's goodness and love?

A *ghostly* shadow on an X-ray? The *spectre* of what may happen in the future? A *phantom* danger that seemed very real to you at the time?

It often doesn't take much to make us cry out in fear and wonder where God is and why He isn't helping us.

The inner sinner in each of us doesn't trust God or think He knows what He's doing or knows what we need *right now*.

You've been there. I have, too—those times when **God with us** seemed more like a ghost than a real presence.

And so Jesus gets into the boat with them. **Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid**, He says. Immediately, all is calm.

They're not afraid anymore – Jesus is real, not a ghost.

But they don't understand either. They can't connect the dots just yet. The loaves and fishes, calming winds and waves, Jesus walking on the water. They couldn't figure it all out.

They were, Mark tells us, **utterly astounded. Utterly astounded. Why? Because miracles are not enough.**

Miracles reveal that Jesus, Lord of creation, can even calm the seas with a word and walk on water. In Christ, God has shown that he can heal sicknesses by His Word or by someone touching the hem of His garment;

Miracles show that Jesus can feed a multitude of people with just a little bit of food.

But in all that awesome display of sheer divine power, *notice . . .* there's no comfort, no confidence, no hope. The disciples are left ***utterly astounded.***

Now, miracles are nice, don't get me wrong. We often pray for miracles, don't we? And sometimes miracles happen!

But what happens when they don't? Because that happens, too. When, despite our prayers, a loved one dies. When troubles aren't going away. When it ***even seems*** as if God is using His power against you! What then?

We've seen the awesome power of tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. We've witnessed the awesome terror and death inflicted by a lone, crazed gunman.

When we are **utterly astounded** at the power of God, nature, and evil. ***What should you think when you are a weak little child faced with all this incredible power?***

Well, if miracles are all you have, you won't know what to think truthfully. One moment, God is for you; the next, He seems against you.

One moment, He likes you; the next, He seems to hate you.

One moment, He is feeding you; the next, He seems like a ghost.

Brothers and sisters, we need *more* than miracles. We need to know that all of God's awesome power is **for us**, not just some of the time, but all of the time.

For times when the miracles come and when they don't.

When there's peace or when there's tragedy.

When you're in a desolate place or a green pasture.

When your Savior is with you in the boat or when He is passing by.

We need to know that our Savior uses His awesome power for our benefit, even when what is happening doesn't seem very good. **That's faith.**

To know and believe that your Lord is good *all the time* - not just when things are good ***in your opinion***.

That's what the disciples were still learning and what you and I are still learning.

For it's nice to hear and know about Jesus walking on the water in the wind at three in the morning,

but it's saving and faith-creating to hear and know of Jesus coming to you *as He promised* in the water of your baptism, with the Spirit of God blowing in those waters to come to you and give you faith and make you a child of God, born from above.

A child of God in the grace and care of your heavenly Father. Your heavenly Father who is perfect and perfect in all His ways and who will not let you down or let you go.

It's nice to hear and know also about Jesus feeding a great multitude out in a desolate place with only five loaves of bread and two fish, **but it's saving and faith-sustaining** to hear and know of Jesus coming to you *as He promised* in the bread and wine of His Supper, with the very Body and Blood of your Savior strengthening you with the forgiveness of your sins.

The forgiveness earned by the same Body and Blood of Jesus as He hung upon the cross for you. As He bore your sins to take your sins away. All of them. Nothing now to hold against you or to separate you from your Father and His love.

And so it is not ***the awesome power of God*** that gives us the faith and hope we need. In fact, it took what we could call ***an awesome display of weakness*** to provide what you need the most - the cross's weakness.

On the cross, Jesus did not use His awesome power as God. He did not come down to smite his enemies but endured the condemnation of your sins deserved by laying down His life for you so that you could live.

Mount Calvary was the one place Jesus would not pass by, for to go to the cross is why He was born.

You need more than a longer, easier life here on earth; you need an eternal life with Him.

And so the faith that endures through the good times and the bad times, the times when miracles come and when they don't, that is confident in both peace and tragedy, is the faith that rests not on the awesome power of God but on God's promises.

That's what Noah needed, too. He had just witnessed God's awesome power in the flood, but he needed God's promise of *never again*.

Otherwise, Noah and those who would come after him would have to keep looking back over their shoulders, would keep wondering: is it going to happen again? Is it too sinful again? Is God going to act again?

And just like with the disciples, there would be no confidence, no peace, no hope, just **utterly astounded** at the awesome power of God. But God pointed to the rainbow and promised Noah: **Never again. Don't be afraid.**

And that's the message of the cross for you, and the promise of the cross given to you here in Word and Sacrament: **Don't be afraid. Never again.**

Your conscience may convict you, the world may attack you, your faith may waver and doubt, but the cross of your Savior assures you that Jesus will not pass you by.

And He promises that here in water and words and bread and wine, He and His cross are here for you. To forgive you, to strengthen you, to keep you, and to give you hope and confidence and life.

That, as St. Paul said, **you may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge - its breadth and length and height and depth - and be filled with all the fullness of God. For He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.**

Paul points you to the cross and says: *Don't be afraid. Never again.* Your sin debt is paid in full. **Jesus promised you. AMEN**