

Mark 6:45-56 A talk by Rev David Eastwood on 5 September 2021

Today we have a very well-known passage. Mark has been building up to this.

Jesus is healing many people, he's teaching them. The stakes are raised with demons being driven out. Storms are stilled. Then the feeding of the 5,000. And now this – walking on water. Then more healings.

Where's all this heading – we will see in two chapters time – in chapter 8 – the turning point of the whole gospel. But for now, the disciples don't get it, they don't understand –

Their hearts were hardened we are told. What about you today? How is your heart? How is your understanding of Jesus?

Jesus is trying to get his disciples away from the front line. They're tired, exhausted, it was getting late. So Jesus sends them on ahead, whilst he deals with the crowd. Something is brewing. Whenever you see Jesus going away to pray, going up a mountainside to pray, something is about to happen. He did that when he chose the 12.

And from the mountainside he could see the disciples in the boat, straining at the oars because the wind was against them, and they're getting nowhere. And he goes out to them, walking on the water.

Mark wants us to see this is Jesus, the Messiah, and the Son of God. This Jesus is capable of doing things that no one in history has ever done – feeding the 5,000 and now walking on water. Lake Galilee is about 13 miles long, and 7 miles wide. The disciples are in the middle of the lake – only gone about 3 miles – the sea is rough. And Jesus goes out to them, walking up the waves and down the other side. The disciples are terrified. They had no idea what was going on. The myths of the day were that if you saw a spirit or a ghost on the sea, this meant that a disaster was about to happen. It was maybe 3.00am in the morning now – we all know what it's like at that time of the morning – we can be at our lowest.

And then Jesus appears, walking on water. And the disciples are afraid, and cry out in fear.

- We can forget that before Jesus walked around Galilee, he made the hills he walked on
- Before he hung on a cross, he made the wood they crucified him on
- And before he walked on water, he made the water in the first place, so he could walk on it

It's not difficult for the creator God, to walk on water. And he says to them – Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. In the Greek, what he says is this - Don't be afraid, I am

This is really important. Jesus is making it clear that he is **the I am** – the name given to God in Exodus 3. God saying to Moses at the burning bush – 'tell them **I am** sent you'. The words Mark record are, Don't be afraid – ego eimi, - I am. And this '**it is I**', leads into the great '**I am**' statements of Jesus in John's gospel. I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life.....

And all of these point to Jesus being God.

'Take courage, Jesus says, It is I. Don't be afraid'

Jesus is saying – I am in charge.

There's no record here of Peter going out to meet Jesus on the water – probably because this is a record of Peter's teaching, and Peter not wanting to mention his own involvement here. What Mark wants us to see is this – this is Jesus the Jewish Messiah, but also the Son of God for everyone.

But what's the message for us? Look at verses 51 and 52:

'Then Jesus climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.'

Not hardened through disobedience – like Pharaoh's heart was hardened in the story of Moses. This hardness of heart is ignorance. The disciples simply didn't understand. And what does Jesus do in response to ignorance? He comes alongside. God gives grace to the humble, but resists the proud. Next week we shall see God resisting the proud. But now we what we see is his grace to the humble.

The disciples had no idea what they had got themselves into. They were following a great leader. A person empowered by God in astonishing ways. But they have no real understanding of who Jesus actually is.

And over the next few chapters, Mark takes us on a journey, just as Jesus was taking his disciples on a journey. He wants them, and he wants us to grasp that he is the Lord, the Son of God. And at that point (in chapter 8) everything changes – the gospel moves from Galilee towards Jerusalem, and the cross.

The disciples in the boat are ignorant, they don't understand. What does Jesus do? He gets in the boat with them. He comes alongside, and sits with them, and the wind dies down. He offers grace, rather than correction.

How do you feel today?

Maybe as you watch the news from around the world, you're like me, and sometimes just don't understand what's going on, or there are things going on in your life right now that are difficult. You can't really explain it. And you feel fearful and unsettled.

If that's you, Jesus understands. Jesus comes to sit in your boat. Don't be afraid, he says.

I am the Holy One, the great I am. And I am moving towards you, to give you grace.

We all need this.

So where are you?

- Are you still at the feeding of the 5,000 – you still don't understand who Jesus really is, and your heart is hardened?
- Are you rowing away on the lake, striving, working hard, but being blown about and getting nowhere?
- Are you fearful? Weighed down? Unsettled? Anxious?
- Or are you ready to welcome Jesus on board and who says: 'It is I, don't be afraid'

AMEN