

20240714 Rowing with Jesus - Ps Bijoy

John 6:16-21 “¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles,^[b] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.”

In Mark’s reference of this same story there is a very abrupt end to the story of the feeding, and Jesus moves away very quickly. He dispatches his disciples, he dismisses the crowd, and he then goes up into the mountain to pray.

There’s a wonderful picture there of Jesus that we might almost miss, insofar as he is the one who finally brings closure to it all. He says to the disciples, “You can go on now. I’ll wait here and finish things up. And when I finish things up, then I will go and talk with my Father.” And, of course, that’s exactly what happens.

And as a result of that, the scene is then set for another miracle. And what we have here is just that. It is a powerful, visible demonstration of the sovereignty of Jesus over the entire world that he has created. The writer to the Hebrews, in his immediate picture that he gives of Jesus in the opening chapter (Heb 1:3), refers to him as the one who “upholds the universe by the word of his power.” And the reason he’s able to write that is because the record of the life and ministry of Jesus testifies to the very same thing.

In verse 16, the journey begins: “When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea.” The reason they went down to the sea is because Jesus had told them to do that. They were going in obedience. They were heading now to the northwest of the shore of the Sea of Galilee, because they were now moving back to Capernaum. And John tells us that it was dark.

And the story is straightforward there. They have begun to cross the sea. They’re moving across the sea in the darkness, and the sea becomes rough. Verse 18: “The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing” against them. Now, that was nothing new to them. That wasn’t something that they had never experienced before. The Sea of Galilee is thirteen miles long. At its widest point it is eight miles wide. At the narrowest point it is a little less than five miles. And so it is that on that sea, with which they were familiar, they are making their attempt at reaching their destination.

And after rowing, maybe for “about three or four miles,” around three o’clock in the morning—Mark, again, tells us, “about the fourth watch of the night” which is approximately three o’clock in the morning—so, pitch dark, on a boat, on a familiar sea, with the wind hitting them straight on in the face, they are ready for just about anything.

And it's in that context that Jesus appears. Jesus comes "walking on the sea ... coming near to the boat, and they were frightened."

Also, it was a popular belief back then that spirits of the night brought disaster. This is something very, very different because none of the old testament prophets ever walked on the water in the past even Moses walked through the dry ground of red sea.

Here in the gospel of Mark, this is what he says: the disciples "did not understand about the loaves, ... their hearts were hardened." They were right there to see exactly what was happening. They were in touching distance of the miracle worker himself. But even that miracle did not actually open their eyes to see who he was. They were following him, but they didn't know who he was.

The journey begins. Jesus appears. Thirdly, Jesus spoke to them. He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Now, that is a phrase in Greek that you will remember, *ego eimi*. *Ego eimi*. If you remember way back to our studies in Genesis, in Joseph, you remember when in that great moment of self-disclosure, when Joseph takes, as it were, the veil from himself, and he says to his brothers who have hated him and pursued him in such a deathly way, he says to them, "You know, I don't want you to be concerned about these things. It's me—*ego eimi*. It's me. It's Joseph."

In verse 20: their fears are addressed—addressed by the presence of Christ. His command to them is one of the most familiar commands, incidentally—we ought to be encouraged by this—it's one of the most familiar commands in the whole of the Bible. And so, in verse 21: "Then they were glad." They gladly took him into the boat, "and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."

Few things the scripture reminds us is that the proximity to Jesus is no guarantee of real faith. Proximity to Jesus is no guarantee of real faith. Real faith is to be found in genuine, repentant, believing trust. Also, sometimes we're tossed about on the rough seas in our life, and we are living in the realm of uncertainty. It's a challenging task to be a Christian in these days. But it is also true that just as Jesus calmed their fears by making his presence known, so he does in coming to us to provide for us, to protect us, to accompany us, to empower us.

And we need to remind ourselves that trials come to prove us and to reprove us. It is in the trials that we learn things. Because God puts his people in situations in order that he might stretch their faith in Him. That is sometimes merely in the routine of everyday life. Sometimes it's in the difficulty of illness, bereavement, loss of job, collapsing relationship, whatever it might be. And at that point anybody would say, well, I just feel myself out to be in the midst of the sea. I don't think that there's a destination to which I'm heading, and there's no one possibly able to help me unless there is somebody who 'plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm, And, of course, the Bible says there is, and He is our eternal saviour Lord Jesus Christ!