

“Lent, Life and Living”
Sermon Series: “The Way of Jesus”

Mark 6:45-56

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Mark 6:45-56 (NIV)

Jesus Walks on the Water

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵²for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

Transcription of the 11:15 a.m. Sermon

Peter shared that this passage of scripture is found in every single Gospel. There are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. So, one would want to pay attention to the stories that are in all four of the Gospels. You may not know this, but not every story is in each of the four Gospels. Each of the four Gospels has a different take on the ministry and life of Jesus. This has an important part to play in what we will be sharing today. I also wanted to mention that today is the First Sunday of Lent and therefore all around the world in many, many churches the lectionary scripture reading for today is the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness which is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is this story where he is tempted three times and then he begins his ministry. He is baptized by John the Baptist, which we considered last week when John was beheaded in the Gospel story. Jesus is baptized and set out into the wilderness and he is tempted. So, that story is the story that is considered on the first Sunday of Lent around the world and I wish to connect the two scriptures today.

First, let's read the scripture. (Reads Mark 6:45-56.) This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.



Let us pray.

As the scripture has been opened to us through its reading, we request wisdom for its interpretation and application in our personal lives. In this world of tumult, your word supports us and holds us up, so we ask now that this time would be profitable, edifying our souls, renewing our minds, transforming us from one degree of life to the next. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

When I was a boy growing up near Milwaukee, we lived by the Lake Michigan, which is one of the five Great Lakes. For those of you who have never seen the Great Lakes you might as well just see an ocean, because they look the same, except you can swim in the Great Lakes without risk of being eaten by a shark. The Great Lakes are massive bodies of water.

As a little boy, my grandfather would take me down to the great docks of Milwaukee, right on the lake shore of Lake Michigan. He worked for the C & O Railroad Company as a manager coordinating all the train freight that got loaded up onto the car ferries. It was cheaper apparently to take the train freight across on ferries rather than going all the way down around Chicago and up to Detroit with freight for the car industry production. He would take me down to the docks and I would watch as these massive freight trains, (like the ones can see here along MoPac) trains loaded with iron ore coming from Northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula and they would get loaded onto a massive steel boat. I always wondered how that boat floats.

When I would trying to swim, I would sink. But how does this massive steel boat, filled with iron ore in trains, float? As a little boy, I wondered this. I asked my grandfather and I didn't quite understand his explanation, because he used big words like 'displacement' and 'buoyancy.' But then when we went home, he took me into the back yard and we went swimming and he showed me how a jar closed and sealed would float and I began **to understand the principal of sealing oneself off from the outside so that influences or the outside would not leak in.**

This is a principal that has been known throughout time regarding boat building and other things, like winterizing our homes. We would put plastic on the windows to prevent the winter wind from coming in and we would caulk the homes. In this principal, we sealed our homes from the weather and you can begin to see the similarity of the principal. One of the most important things that we can do as we approach the scriptures is to read through principals.

One of the principals we are going to consider today, as we look at this text – this miracle story if you will – **is the principal of sealing ourselves off from the external influences of life.** Indeed, sealing ourselves off from our own thoughts and feelings, because these thoughts and feelings can often times sink us. If you are like me, it doesn't take too many people cutting in front of me on Bee Caves Road to have this external influence impact my internal situation and all of sudden I feel like giving somebody the 'you know what.' You are looking at me like, you don't believe me. (Audience laughter.)



But these negative emotions creep up as I go throughout my daily life, out there in the world, meeting with people, driving on the roads, listening to the radio, watching television, living with my beloved Christina. All of this stuff is external life and it has an impact on me and thus this principal of sealing ourselves off from that which is on the outside of us for the purpose of remaining peaceful on the inside and not being swamped by life and its very powerful effect on us.

Now, to consider this story we need to remember the power of the image or the symbol of water that runs throughout the whole scriptures; and not just within the Christian or Hebrew scriptures – this is a worldwide anthropological, cultural phenomenon that **water is the symbol for the power and chaos of life.**

Now water, we know in Texas, is absolutely necessary to sustains things and when we don't have it we call it a drought. Water is living giving. We need it to live. Our bodies are mostly water. But, on the other side there is a very destructive power to water. Throughout history, human kind has used the symbol of water to describe the chaos that can occur in life. So, for example the reality of a Tsunami, swapping a country, bringing total devastation or a flood for example here in Central Texas and how much damage a flood can do. These are real life examples of the power of water bringing destruction. But, it is also allegorical or psychological **that water throughout scripture is used to describe the psychological or spiritual chaos that people live in.** Now this goes all the way back to the very beginning of our ancient stories.

The Book of Genesis begins by God separating the waters, creating a space for human kind to dwell at safety and able to flourish on this beautiful Earth. But then a little bit later on in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 7, we are told of a story that God regretted creating humankind because they had turned their hearts away from God and become wicked and they were living in such a way that God regretted making humankind. What occurs in this story, which can be taken both literally and symbolically, I leave it to you to discern the distinction – the point is that the flood that occurs is a devastating power of water, wiping away humankind. But the interesting thing here to note of this story, is the likeness of the principal of sealing oneself from the waters of chaos.

Whereas in our Gospel story, Jesus is seen walking on top of the water, in the Noahic story, God is gracious to Noah and commands him to build an arc. In this way he seals himself and his family off from the influences of the chaotic waters. Again, you may take this literally or figuratively. In this way, psychologically you can see that the chaos represented by human kind that God regrets making is associated with the chaos of the waters swamping them, but Noah is sustained because he is sealed off from the very thing that is destroying humankind, he is in an arc sealed from its influences.

Now, we come to Jesus and this story of his temptations in the wilderness, because here is where we see its connection to the story of Jesus walking on the water. The story of Jesus' temptation that is found for example in Luke, Chapter 4, shows us that he is tempted in three ways. If you remember he is baptized, again the symbol of water, anointing him by the Spirit and then sent into the wilderness and there he is tempted three ways. At first he is tempted to turn



the rock into bread, this is the **temptation of security and survival**. By the way, all these are temptations familiar to each one of us...the temptation for security and survival, to take care of your own self. Then he is tempted to throw himself down from a high place and show his glory and his power. This is the **temptation for affection and esteem**, because then everyone would bow down. Then there is the third temptation, which is the temptation to bow down before me and I will give you all this power. That is the **temptation to power and control**. So, here you see these three-fold human temptations that Jesus' experiences: 1) security and control; 2) affection and esteem; and 3) power.

Now, what is it that he does, right before walking on the water? Had we read just a bit prior in this text we would see that he was doing another one of these miracle signs. Do you remember what that was? He multiplied a few loaves into many and then the fish as well. This is another sign in the Gospel announcing and declaring something both literally and figuratively that Jesus is representing a different level of human life. That is to say, he is representing a higher being. He is very different from other human beings. He is not like us, completely. He is like us, but something more. This sign of the miracle of turning fear of scarcity into the provision of abundance is a declaration of a reality that he is bringing into that time and space saying, "What you perceive is no longer true, because I am operating on a whole other dimension and I'm able to bring about this new dimension, evening in your very midst and watch God's glory occur." What is it that happens? Of course, people are astounded by this because someone of great being is in their presence and they recognize it demonstrated by this tangible miracle. What is it that they wish to do? They wish to make him king.

What does Jesus do? Again, a reiteration of his temptation to power, control, affection and esteem. It is not his time to become king and the kind of king he is to become is not like they wish for him to be. It is a totally different reality that he is representing. What does he do in response? He goes up to the mountain and goes away alone to pray in solitude. To reconnect with his mission and with Abba, his Father in this spiritual realm of prayer.

Now, the text says that he came to his disciples in the fourth watch of the night. Jesus had sent his disciples across the lake, they got in a little boat and were going across the lake to another town, and he was going to meet them there. But in the fourth watch of the night, which is between 3:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., Jesus was alone up on the mountain praying. Now, by the way Jesus spent a great deal of time praying, in silence, alone in solitude with his father, receiving the influences so that he could seal himself off from all the temptations that were occurring and do his Father's business. Now, why is this so important? Because we can't seal ourselves off like Jesus, so faithfully and continuously, but he did. He enables us to do so in like manner.

Now, let's address the issue of miracles. You all look very smart, beautiful, handsome and sophisticated and so miracles are something that really aren't necessary anymore because science and technology. My gosh we've split the gene and the atom and we know pretty much everything there is to know and we don't need God anymore to explain things. That is pretty much an operating presupposition in much of our Western culture. This friend is one of the most disintegrating ideas that is occurring to us as a human species. We cannot explain



ourselves. Section whatever atom, whatever human you want and you can't explain it by itself. It always is explained by something higher than itself.

On the issue of miracles, the reality of miracles in the scriptures are here to teach us and remind us that there are other alternative laws that are available to human kind that let us know that we are not the only creatures in the universe. These are laws that come from above that break into this world, tearing it as it were, like a rip in reality and revealing a totally different dimension, bringing totally different laws and enabling a different way of being. Now, here are a couple of examples of this, how this principal operates in day-to-day life, because we all long for miracles and the truth is miracles do not occur because God disrupt the game. A pair of aces will always beat a pair of twos. That is the rule. Rules are rarely broken, but in same case when they are, it is called a miracle.

Now, if I want to go and refinance my home and I go to the bank and a young banker greets me and he or she takes my information, processes the loan, and says, "I'm sorry sir, we cannot refinance your home at this time." Just as he or she is giving me this news, the president of the this very bank comes in and says, "Greetings I'm visiting folks from New York and I'm here to just see what I can do. How are you sir?" I reply, "Well, I'm not so good today because I just was declined my refinance." The bank president says, "Oh, come with me." We go to the back room and he or she says to me, "Let me see what I can do." Then the bank president says, "No problem, you've got your refinance. I pulled some strings using my authority." The bank president is operating at a high level of authority and as such that bank president is under fewer laws than the young banker who just graduated from college.

It is like this in the military. Generals are under fewer laws, they have more flexibility and freedom to do certain things. For example, a general can have a refrigerator full of beer or Pepsi in his office; whereas, a private has a little footlocker and there is no liquids allowed. You see the principal here, that the higher you go in being, the greater freedom you have. We human beings down here on planet earth are under a great many laws, so of which we are knowing about, like the law of gravity or the law of cause and effect, which we think since we know these laws, we know everything, but there are many other laws at work.

These are spiritual laws and they come into effect when other higher beings, like angels or in this case, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, being a higher level of being, like a general showing up on the scene and says, "No, we're not doing it this way, I've got my plan." The authority behind the being comes through. This is a principal of hierarchy, which has been lost in our flat lined, democratic way of doing things where we do things by consensus. We've forgotten that the universe is hierarchical, that God is at the top of things and God loves us and reaches down and lifts people up. This order of authority is very, very important. There was one Moses, not a committee.

Now, regarding Jesus' miracle. We go back to the influence that he is under. If the sea, while this is both literally – he is demonstrating his higher authority, it is also psychological. He is demonstrating that he is under other influences than just being swamped by life. If water is life and all the things that can occur life, things we do not plan for, things we do not expect – no one schedules getting news of cancer,



you do not plan for that, it happens to you. No one schedules getting into a car accident or getting diagnosed with heart disease. You may prevent these things, work toward preventing them, but you do not every plan for them. They happen. Thus, human beings in life are very vulnerable.

Humanity recently has gone through a very unsettling period where the very foundations of the financial system were shaken. Regardless of your viewpoint on the solutions that have been offered, the reality is the level of anxiety in communities like this one has gone up in the last two years because of the reality that money has become more scarce or at least show it appears. However, our senses betray us because we think that there is not another source called God who provides abundantly and thus we live in fear not faith.

Now, all these life influences that come, whether it is the person who cuts in front of me or getting into an argument with Christina or wondering if you are going to get accepted to a college that you really want to get into or getting rejected by a college or getting bad news – whatever it is that is happening to you in life, you must remember that is not you; it is something occurring to you. It is not you. Friends we live in a cultural that has become swamped by life. We are not sealed off.

In fact, there is a word for this and it is called being identified. We become so identified with our titles, our income and in our situations, whether they are good or bad, that we are like red wine spilled on a white tablecloth – pressed in and so identified. We hear it in our language for example, we say, “I am sick. I am poor. I am getting a divorce.” You are not those things. They are occurring in your life. The scriptures declare something profound, listen:

Your life is hidden with God in Christ.

You can't see it. You can't taste it. You can't feel it. It is not observable with the five senses. It is known inwardly which is why Jesus retreated in solitude and silence to remember who he was and what was true. Thus, what occurs next, he walks on the water. He walks upon the very thing that is frightening the disciples to death. Think about this allegorically. Think about this psychologically, in your context, in your life – whether it is the bills or the kids or the marriage. **Jesus is walking on top of it.** He is as if it were suspended from life, being attracted by a reverse gravity holding him up and this is the reverse gravity of God's love, pulling him up from life so that he is suspended above life and this is what we are taught – we are in the world, but not of the world. We are walking on top of it demonstrating a totally different capacity to be in the world – to walk on top of it, not being sunk down into it. Not being swamped by it, not being consumed by it, not being identified with it so that we forget ourselves and that we remember our Father and that his is who we truly are – I'm going home, I'm coming back, I've come back to my senses. The prodigal son story.

Now, the image of Peter and Jesus gives us a very important contrast as this applies to you and me. The truth is, none of us can be completely sealed off from life. As much as I make my daily intention to love my neighbor or my colleague or my wife and as much as I make my daily intention to love my family, who are sometimes very difficult to love, I find that the negative emotions seep into me. I



found that my negative thoughts and feelings take over me. I find that I cannot control my words. This is because I am identified with what I am seeing and thinking and I am not sealed off.

Peter gives me hope. The Apostle Peter, who although not recorded in this Gospel story, in Matthew and Luke what happens next in the story is that Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water. Now he does not walk on the water very long. For a moment he is inspired by this ultimate vision of reality of being broken into by the presence of Jesus Christ walking on top of the water and he walks on top of the water because he is sustained by a moment of faith. But, then betrayed his senses, he looks down and he remembers reality and starts to sink and just as that moment occurs the grace of God is there to support him and hold him and this allegorically applies to each of our lives, because when we fall Christ lifts us up. That is the purpose and that is the way – fall and get up by grace. **Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit sustains us, which is why we retreat in prayer.**

How do we seal ourselves off from all these influences of life – from the fear? The fear was very profound of those disciples. One of the ways is to remember and to, as in the scripture says, **“Let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you.”**

We are sealed from the inside by the scriptures. They are like a tower of light, baring all the darkness. We must receive the Word of Christ and this occurs through the scriptures, but it also occurs through worship, through the sacraments, through prayer and through loving our neighbor; but primarily, let the Word of Christ dwell richly in you.

When he heard that his disciples were afraid, Jesus responded on two levels. He said, “Do not be afraid. It is I.” It is very important to realize that the very Greek construction, ‘It is I,’ is the exact construction of the name given to Moses by God when Moses ask God, “Who shall I tell has sent me.” And God, says, “I Am sent you. My name is I Am.” Jesus is identifying himself with the ultimate source of all power and authority and glory and light and life and love and he is saying, “It is I, if you have eyes to see and hearts to believe.” Thus Peter says, “Who else can we go to, you have the words of eternal life.” He is representing Jesus’ something from above friends, not just in the history of humankind, but in this very moment available to you and to me.

Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is here right now if you surrender to it.” And friends, I believe in my own life it verifies this to be true, that the more I trust God and receive the Word of Christ and enter into silent prayer, the more I feel sealed off from life and thus am able to contain a different kind of quality. That is the quality of the Spirit. Let the Spirit fill you and the Spirit will produce spiritually gifts. They will flourish. They will be abundant in your life.

Thus it is very important to seal our leaks. Leaks like addictions. Leaks like certain behaviors that we can’t seem to get rid. It is not being a good boy or a good girl. That is not what Lent is about. Lent is about turning from the programs that we turn to so often for our happiness and ultimately we are losing force because we are leaking out of these things. Our normal reactivity to the people we love. Our normal negativity. Our normal addictions. Looking for happiness from a glass of wine or two versus taking some time to just drink a glass of water.



The question isn't is wine bad or is meat bad. The question is why do you need the drink? Because you are leaking and we turn to these crutches, whether they are TV or movies, or meat or wine or whatever it is. All of God's good creation is good and it is not about become a good boy or a good girl or being a good Catholic or a good evangelical or whatever it is. It is about remembering what the purpose of your life is. Just like those boats built to contain something – human beings were built to contain something and we've got to plug up the holes and coming to worship and partaking in the scriptures and partaking in the Lenten exercises is the means by which we do this and I deeply believe and I am experiencing it in my own life and my own marriages is being changed by it, because I am being filled with something else that I don't have on my own. I urge you to dwell with these ideas that you might walk on the waters of life, regardless of what is occurring, not being identified so much with it, whether things are good or bad – it is just life.

Your true life, the life of abundance, the life that is eternal is now and forever available to you through this personal interior spiritual relationship that Jesus modeled. Remember that Jesus said, "I am the way." It is not just philosophical, it is very practical. This is the way to life. You must seal yourself from it.

May the Lord helps us in this and may this Lenten season be a means of doing that because we need to help one another, encourage one another to do this. It is not the natural inclination of our culture to help us seal ourselves. This is a work that requires effort and grace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit we pray, requesting help to be human that we might flourish in abundance, full of light, life and love. Amen.

