

Goal: That the hearers would understand that Jesus is God over all.

My wife is a great help for me in reflecting on how my sermon went. Each Sunday I usually ask, “*well, how was it?*” She usually says, “*good.*” But sometimes says, “*I thought you were going to go a different way*”. Well, today is one of those texts that I’m sure that you’ve heard so often that you already think you know what I should preach. When we think about the story of Jesus calming the storm, it’s easy to jump to the conclusion that we all face storms in life, and that Jesus comes and calms them all. When you’re afraid, Jesus drives away your fears and you set sail to a better life. Well, maybe we should slow down a bit here and not assume that we already know what’s going on, because if we don’t we might miss what God is trying to tell us through His word.

Sure, it’s true that we all experience life storms, and yes, things can get really bad, to the point that we can get so scared, we need Jesus to rescue us. But, does Jesus always calm your storm? Does He always fix your problems? Does every bad thing that’s ever happened to you in your life always have a happy ending? Maybe, but maybe not. At least that’s not how things happened in this story.

Let’s look closely at the text. It doesn’t say, “*And when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were overjoyed and at that moment the winds ceased and waves subsided.*” No! They were having a hard time because they were sailing against the wind. And Jesus was just walking on the water, meaning to pass them by. (“***And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, (but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.***” (Mark 6: 48 – 50) That’s not how I remembered it. Do you? I mean, I thought that Jesus showed up and everything was fine. But here it says Jesus doesn’t even plan on stopping, which means that there are times that the Lord just allows us to experience pain and doesn’t fix it for us.

But it gets better. “***When they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.***” Does this sound anything like the story you remember? The disciples recognize that it’s Jesus, and they all jump to the conclusion that He’s a ghost? Sounds extreme doesn’t it? And remember who made them get into the boat in the first place? “***Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. (And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.***” (Mark 6: 45 – 46) And when they saw Him, He doesn’t plan to stop.

Maybe you're thinking now that you liked the version of the story you had in mind before I slowed us down to made you dive into the text. But now that I've dispelled a few of your expectations, let's see what the story in Mark 6 is really about.

The main point here isn't complicated, but the explanation will take a little bit of work. You see, this text isn't about the disciples, or what they are going through, but it's about Jesus! It's all about Jesus manifesting Himself to His disciples. There's a big word that describes this type of appearance, that's theophany. Theophany means an appearance of God showing His divinity. There are many theophanies in the Bible. In Exodus 33, God tells Moses that He will hide him in the cleft of a rock while He passes by. In Matthew 9, Jesus is transfigured before His disciples in all of His glory. When Jesus makes a theophany, He's showing us that He's not just a man, He is also God.

So, why is Jesus now revealing His divinity to the disciples? Because after seeing Him feed 5000 men they still, (***“He got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”*** *Mark 6: 51 – 52*) That's kind of a strange statement to put in the middle of a boat story, but apparently the disciples just didn't get that Jesus was God. So, seeing Him walking on water, revealing Himself in this theophany, is going to fix that.

This is a good lesson for us to learn as well. Too often, I think that we overlook the reality that Jesus is actually God Almighty. One of the dominant metaphors we hear in Christian circles today is that Jesus is my best friend, and our students learn songs that describe Him as living in our hearts. So often we see Him portrayed as this sentimental, gentle, laid back, totally relaxed dude who wears sandals and has long hair. In this image, I'm more comfortable sipping a beer with Jesus without a care in the world than showing Him the reverence He's due.

When we relate to God in such an emotional way, we can easily forget that He is the Eternal, All-Powerful, Great I AM, and we can lose sight that He is holy and pure, and perfectly righteous, omnipotent and demanding justice. The image of Jesus being our warm and fuzzy friend, does Him a disservice. Jesus is God, and that image needs to drive our worship, our attitude, and our language so that we might better reflect Him as He is. Honestly, we've become so good at making Jesus casual and easy-going that we've lost our understanding of His Divinity. And that is something we need to repent of.

When Jesus appears, revealing His divinity in a Theophany, you can't approach Him, and you really don't want to, because what you see is terrifying. In fact, you may not even recognize Him, and that's exactly the problem His disciples had. They're more terrified at the sight of God in His divinity than they are of the wind and the waves of the storm. Jesus' appearing, revealing His power and might made the storm that day seem irrelevant.

But, here's the point of this theophany. The author of Creation, the Designer of the entire universe, Who is orders all things and establishes everything there is, lowers Himself to become one with His creation and clothe Himself with our humanity. Throughout His life, He often hid His divinity, as He was born a baby, grew up as a carpenter's son, and lived among His creation, teaching and modeling God's eternal truth. Oh, there were theophanies, such as His reading of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah when He was a teen, or when He was baptized by John in the Jordan, or when He fed the 5000. And Jesus wants His disciples, as well as each of us, to understand His divinity at those moments so that we would understand His divinity as He suffers and dies on Calvary's cross. This theophany is so that we would grasp the depth of His love for you and for me as He willingly dies as a sinner, giving His life on your behalf.

In this life, God hid His divinity from us by revealing it only in a few places in scripture. And in this life, God also hides other things such as the purpose of suffering and the reason for tragedy. Our storms don't always have happy endings, and the explanations may not always obvious, but you can be sure of this, God is your Savior, your Redeemer, your Lord. Proclaimed through His cross and empty tomb are His love and grace for you. You are forgiven and assured of eternal life with Him.

In the Gospel, you don't have explanations. You have something even better. You have promises. You have promises of forgiveness and mercy. You have the promise that death and suffering and tragedy will not have the last word in your life or the lives of your loved ones. In our story today, Jesus shows that He is Lord over the wind and the waves, and in His cross and empty tomb He shows that He is even Lord over death itself. He is not some overly sentimental Jesus or a warm and fuzzy Jesus. He is a Jesus who is both God and man and who lives and dies that you would have the forgiveness of your sins and live in that freedom every day of your life. This is actually a sermon you've heard before and you will hear again because this is the Gospel of the Lord. Amen.