

"...but their hearts were hardened"

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[0:00] He came to heaven, and he seated at the right hand of the Father.! He will come again in glory to judge the living in the dead,! And his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptist in the forgiveness of sins. We look for the life of the dead and the life of the world.

Amen. Please be seated. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, from whom every family on earth is named, we ask that according to the riches of your glory, you may grant us to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in our inner being.

[1:19] Take away from us that stubbornness of heart that makes us resistant to the truth in your word. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and a willing heart to respond in faith to your word for us this morning, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that we may be more rooted and grounded in his love.

and it is in his holy name we pray. Amen. Amen. Our appointed gospel reading for this Sunday is Mark 6, verse 45 to 52.

It's the account of the miracle of Jesus as he walked on water. It's on page 1001 of your pew Bible. I encourage you to open and follow along if you can. The miracle is a familiar one. Even many non-Christians or non-churchgoers know of this miracle.

In last week's gospel reading, for example, we saw another familiar miracle in that reading, the feeding of the 5,000. And actually, all three synoptic gospels have a near identical retelling of that miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

[2:51] But St. John's gospel gives us a more context around that miracle. We know in his account of the miracle in John chapter 6, that the people, when they saw the sign, that is the miraculous feeding, they said concerning Jesus, this indeed is the prophet who is to come into the world.

The miraculous feeding captured Israel's imagination because they had a tradition that they believed that the Messiah, when he appears, will feed the people, just as Moses had done in the wilderness.

And so when they saw Jesus feeding 5,000 people, miraculously, they rightly concluded, based on that miracle, that Jesus was the Messiah. And they wanted, what did they want to do after they came to that realization?

They wanted immediately to make him king over them. So, he could do what? In their minds, probably, he could then come and defeat the Roman occupation and restore the dynastic line of David.

So they sought, actually, John tells us, to take him by force to make him their king. So, that's the context of that miracle.

[4:12] But Jesus, quickly, seeing this, send his disciples ahead of him in a boat, we're told, by Mark. Probably so they wouldn't join in the crowd's madness.

So, Jesus sent them off in a boat. And then he, alone, dismissed the crowd. And then he went up to a mountain to pray.

Now, we must keep the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 in mind as we look at this passage this morning because it plays a pivotal role in what's going on in this miracle of Jesus walking on the water.

And then look in verse 52 because that's the crucial verse. there we're told, after seeing the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, their hearts were hardened because they did not understand about

the lows.

It's a terrifying judgment, the hardness of heart. And whenever the Bible speaks of the hardness of heart, it is a serious pronouncement of unbelief towards God.

[5:25] It's a rejection of the person of God and a denial of his mighty acts. So, for example, you look in the Old Testament, we see Pharaoh's heart hardened against God.

And this hardness of heart is exhibited by his refusal to let the Hebrews go. Thus by seeing the mighty works of God.

And later in Exodus, we also see another hardness of heart among the Israelites themselves. They would see the deliverance from Egypt, who have seen God parting the Red Sea, feeding them with manna through the wilderness.

Yet their hearts were increasingly hardened, so much so that they begin to murmur against God and his prophet Moses. And ultimately, in their unbelief and hardness of heart, they refuse to go and take the land God promised them.

And so, every time we see the hardness of heart, it's a pronouncement of God's judgment. In the Gospels, we see also hardness of heart. We see Jesus grieved and angered at the hardened hearts of the Pharisees, the scribes, and the religious leaders of the people.

[6:44] They refuse to see Jesus for who he was. They refuse to acknowledge his mighty works. It's the word of the Bible. Those whose hearts are hardened are those who have set themselves against God's word and against his messenger.

So, it's a frightening thing to read here in verse 52, to see the words used, to see that same word used concerning the disciples themselves, Jesus' closest followers.

verse. And you might think to yourself, I can't believe this. After all, these 12 have witnessed how can their hearts be hardened against Jesus?

It's shocking to think that that is what's going on with the disciples. And I hope as you read that, as you think about it, and the shock of it, I hope it gives you pause as we ourselves think about our own hearts as well.

Because if proximity and knowledge about Jesus are not sufficient to soften a hardening heart, then we might as well ask ourselves, what then can?

[8:00] And that's the question I hope we can answer this morning. So, let's look back at the story here, as Mark tells it to us. The disciples have seen the mighty displays of King Jesus.

As He displays His power over nature. They've seen it all throughout Mark. The Gospel of Mark. God, Jesus Christ, has displayed His power over nature, over sickness, and over even the forces of darkness.

And in response to the people's desire to crown Him as King, Jesus instead dismissed them. He sent His disciples ahead of Him.

And then He went to pray. Now, this going to pray is one of three key points in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus tells us that Jesus went alone to pray.

Of course, Jesus probably went alone to pray numerous other times, but these are the three key times. And this is one of the three key times that Mark tells us that He did so.

[9:00] The first time He did so was early in the Gospel of Mark when He went away to pray, when He was in Capernaum, when He determined that His mission is primarily to proclaim the Gospel of salvation.

And to call people to repentance. And not just to heal the sick and meet physical needs. Remember that in the Gospel of Mark the disciples were looking for Him. And then they finally find Him and they say, we've been looking all over for you.

People are also looking for you. And Jesus says, you would think Jesus would say, well, let's go meet them. No, Jesus said, let's go to the next town. So I may continue my ministry of preaching repentance of sin and that the kingdom of God is at hand.

And so that's the first time. The third time is later, of course, in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was faced with the agony of bearing the Father's wrath upon, the Father's wrath for sin upon His shoulders.

And the second time is what we see here in chapter 6. This time He's confronted with being the king, being made king according to the world's plan.

[10:12] We do know, of course, that He is king. When He came, He pronounced that the kingdom of God is at hand because He, the king, is real. But His kingdom, which He's come to secure, the

rule and reign which He's come to secure, is not according to man's plan or man's timetable.

He has come to do His Father's will, we're told in the Bible. And He's completely submitted to the Father's plan, not to the Israelites' plan. And so He goes to pray to reaffirm His submission to His Father's plan rather than the people's desire and even perhaps His disciples' desire.

And so then we go on in verse 47 and Mark tells us that as He has sent them off ahead of Him, He's dismissed the crowd and then when evening came, the boat was out on the sea.

That is the boat on which the disciples were, was out on the sea. And He was alone on the land.

And He saw from the land that they were making edgeway painfully but the wind was against them.

And about the fourth watch of the night, that is between three and six a.m. in the morning, He came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them.

[11:39] Now the disciples have been rowing all night. I mean, He probably dismissed them, you know, mid-evening, you know, and then they've gone on the boat.

And they've been rowing all night against this wind. And they were getting nowhere. And here comes God. The God who made the waters and all that is in it. By the way, when you read this account of the miracle of Jesus walking on water, many scoffers, I describe them as that, scoffers of God's Word have gone to great lengths to explain away this miracle.

One suggestion is that Jesus was probably walking on a sandbar, hidden from the Apostle's view, and it just appeared that He was walking on water.

That is utter nonsense. The Sea of Galilee is in most places more than 80 feet deep. And there's no known sandbar anywhere on the Sea of Galilee.

And these disciples, they're fishermen, familiar with the sea. So they would have known if there was such a thing. In actuality, the water recognizes its creator and obediently becomes a road for Him to walk on.

[13:02] That's the miracle that's happening here. And we're told this really interesting phrase, He meant to pass by them.

Now, I hope this seems strange. It seems strange to me as I read it initially. But I think Mark is doing something here. Mark's words are meant to evoke in our minds Exodus 33.

What happened in Exodus 33? It's where Moses asked to see God's glory. And what was Yahweh's reply to Moses?

Yahweh replied to Moses. His reply was to put him within a cleft of the rock while his glory passed by Moses. And he was permitted to see just God's back.

Because to see God's face would have been too much for Moses. It would have meant death. And so God obliged Moses and put him in the cleft of the rock and he passed by.

[14:06] He covered his face and he passed by and then allowed Moses to see the back of his glory. And he told Moses, You cannot see my face for man shall not see God and live.

Well, I think Mark is trying to evoke that, what's going on there in Exodus 33. Jesus intends to reveal his glory to the disciples as he passes by them in verse 48.

Just like he did to Moses. And what is going on in this passage is nothing short of a theophany. A theophany is a visible manifestation of God to humankind.

That's what's going on here. Jesus wants them to see that he is God. The God of the Old Testament. The God of Moses and Elijah. He is the shepherd king who has come to feed his people and to rescue them from their slavery.

But what happens as they saw Jesus passing by? They saw him walking on the sea and they thought it was a ghost. and they cried out.

[15:22] They freaked out upon seeing Jesus walking on the water. Mark tells us they thought it was a ghost. They probably took it as a bad omen. They all saw him.

Verse 50 tells us. It wasn't just an apparition that a few of them saw. They all saw him. It's not an hallucination. They all saw him and they were terrified. Mark said, by the way, as you read that part, I sympathize with the disciples because if I was there, I don't blame them at all.

I don't know about you, but I would be terrified as well. Imagine seeing your friend, whom you know. You know very well. All of a sudden, you see him.

They haven't been along with Jesus yet, but they've known him well enough. And we don't know what they thought about Jesus, but they certainly don't think he's God. They don't know. he's God yet. All of a sudden, in the midst of a mighty opposing wind, they've been rowing all night, rowing grown men.

They're not getting anywhere. All of a sudden, they see their friend just strolling by underwater. How would you feel if you see that? You would be terrified as well. So I don't blame them in that regard. [16:43] God? Another key interesting thing about this story is the patterns of boat journeys in Mark chapter 4 and Mark chapter 6.

Because this isn't the first time that there's an incident on a boat with Jesus and his disciples. Remember Mark 4? At that point, in that account, Jesus was in the boat with them. Mighty storm. Great storm. Out of nowhere. and they thought they were going to die and Jesus was just there in the boat sleeping. And they woke him up and they said, do you not care that we perish? And the compassionate God sees the waves and with a word, calms the waters. And then, chided them.

Do you have, why are you afraid? He tells them in chapter 4. And so you see here, displays so far throughout Mark, if you've been reading Mark from chapter 1 up to here, you've known, this is the second account of a boat event, and a display of God's mighty works.

[17:54] So that at this point, you might be thinking, these people should by now know who this Jesus is. They've been asking questions about him.

They've seen all he's been doing. it should be getting obvious for them. And in verse 48, chapter 6 of 48, we see on the same lake, probably the same boat, Jesus again appeared to them.

They were terrified, they were afraid, but Jesus appeared to calm their fears. Immediately, he spoke to them and said, take heart, it is high.

Do not be afraid. It is high, he says. The Greek there is *ego eme*. And it's a way in which the Greek writers of the Old Testament described the description of Jesus.

When Moses says to God, Yahweh, what shall I say to the people when I go to them and say that the Lord sent me? What is the word, the name that God gave himself to give to Moses to tell his people?

[19:10] I am that I am. That's the same word here. So, Jesus is both saying, don't be afraid, it's me, you know me, but more than that, he's telling them who he is.

I am is with you. Do not be afraid. Take heart. Yahweh, your God is with you. And surely by this point, you might expect the disciples to then, at this point, connect the dots.

But as you read in verse 51, he got into the boat with them, and the wind seized, and they were utterly astounded.

And at this point, you read that and you're thinking, no doubt, there is astonishment, astonishment, and that is, the astonishment is that they've finally come to a full realization of who Jesus is.

But Mark doesn't end and stop in verse 51, he goes on in verse 52, and describes the nature of their astonishment. For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

[20:20] And that's incredibly sad, isn't it? After all they've seen and experienced, how could they have hardened hearts?

We could ask the same of Pharaoh, for example. After all he's seen about God's mighty works in the plagues, how could his heart be hardened? Or you can ask the same of the Israelites in the wilderness, who were freed from saving Egypt and brought safely through the Red Sea, and given food to eat in the wilderness?

After all they've seen of God's mighty display, and God's compassion, and God's guidance, and God's love lavished on them, how could their hearts be hardened? And there seems to be a lot of parallel between those Israelites and these twelve Israelites, these twelve disciples right now. There seems to be a lot of parallel. After all they've seen of God's mighty acts, how could they have hardened hearts? But before you're too harsh about the disciples, we must remember what the Bible says about the human heart.

Because it's easy to think, as they probably thought, that if all the problems of my life go away, if the Romans' boots are removed from off our necks, if we can be freed from the slavery and our toils of Egypt, if I can be freed from the struggle of my life, my bad relationship, my oppressive work situation, if I can be freed from my awful life circumstances, my traumas, then I would be free to really know God and to love Him.

[22:03] We might be deceived in thinking that. The only thing that's keeping us from really getting close to God, knowing Him, fully trusting Him, fully knowing Him and loving Him is all this problem that is in my way.

But the prophet Jeremiah said concerning the human heart, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick, wicked. Who can understand it?

And if you jump ahead in Mark 7, Jesus Himself quotes Isaiah when He condemns the religious Pharisees who also have hardened hearts. He says of them, these people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Jesus again said of them, from within, from within, out of the heart of man comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

From within, out of the heart, all these things come from within the human heart. And so, realizing in this, perhaps perhaps we should be more sympathetic to the disciples, knowing the deceit of the human heart.

[23 : 19] Because we must know that faith in the person and faith in the work of Jesus Christ is not arrived at by a cold examination of just mere facts.

You cannot reason yourself or someone else to faith. But if what the Bible says about our hearts is true, that it's sick, that it's wicked, then how can someone come to have that new life Jesus gives? How can we, who have been given new hearts, live according to our new nature and not return to the slavery of sin? Well, we must be completely reliant on God, the Holy Spirit, to move our hearts to repentance unto saving faith.

Only God can do the work. He alone can make hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. We must be reliant on God, the Holy Spirit, to preserve us in the faith by doing the work in us that God has prepared beforehand to work in us.

we must not let our hearts be calloused. That's what it means to have hardened hearts. A calloused heart is a heart that is resistant to feeling Jesus, to knowing and responding in faith to God's love.

[24 : 41] And the question we must ask is, are the desires of my heart, the desires of my heart, opposed to the will of God as revealed in His Word?

Do I submit to the truth as God's Word acts as a mirror, revealing the true state of my heart to me? Because that's what God's Word does. As you read and study and observe and hear God's Word, it reveals the reality of the state of our heart.

But when that happens, do I submit to the truth of God's Word concerning my heart? does the truth about Jesus that is proclaimed in the Bible resonate with me?

Do you see in Him, do you see Him, rather, Jesus, as the rescuer, the deliverer? Who alone can save you from your heart and heart?

[25 : 42] Or are you still walking in self-delusion, thinking that you, by your own works, or moral aptitude, can make things right with God?

It's a fine line, but it's a significant one. Because as we see here, these are people who are religious. The Pharisees are religious. They're in the fold. The disciples are Jesus' closest companions.

And yet, they have heart and hearts. hearts. The realization, I think, that should dawn on us at this point is that it is God alone who can change hearts.

That's why we must pray to Him. We must seek His face to do the miracle of turning hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. The kind of heart that can respond to God's call.

we must pray for Him to resuscitate our hearts that are lethargic and weighed down by the cares of the flesh and the cares of the world.

[26 : 50] And as we do so, we are invited to fix our eyes upon Jesus. We alone can do this work. We are invited to depend upon Him and Him alone to preserve us in this Christian life.

And thanks be to God. He is a compassionate King. He is the good shepherd who gives life to us. And He is the one that feeds us.

As we saw in last week's account of the feeding of the 5,000, He is the one that feeds us. He is the one that sustains us from that same life.

He sustains us with His abundant overflowing grace. Jesus. And so, the question then this morning is will you turn from yourself and turn to Jesus?

Or are you going to continue to hear God's word and reject it? The warning is that as you do so, your heart is increasingly calloused and hardened. So if you have not come to Christ, have not entrusted your life to Jesus, I invite you, the day is today.

[28:03] Do not delay. Do not allow the devil to continue to harden and your obstinacy to continue to harden your heart against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Submit. Receive His love. And maybe you have received this love. Maybe your hearts have been changed. But you recognize the struggle as disciples are in this account.

They've come to Jesus. They've received Him as Lord. But yet they're struggling with their unbelief and their old nature. Are you struggling? Do you feel your heart hardening against the people of God?

Or against the gospel of Jesus Christ? Well, you're no better than the apostles. But here's the warning. Don't be like the Pharisees.

Don't give yourself over to mere lip service. rather, watch over your heart. And the best way to do that is by turning it over to Jesus in prayer.

[29:09] That's the best way to watch over your heart. Turn it over to Jesus in prayer and submit to His Word so that He can wash you and sanctify you by the washing of water with the Word as He promised you.

and then trust His promises. Trust His promises that He will hold you fast.

He has given His Word of promise to you, dear saint, that if you abide in His Word, He has promised that He will abide in you. If you remain firmly standing upon Him, He will see you through every storm and trial of this life.

He has lovingly surrounded you with a family of brothers and sisters to build you up in the faith. Trust the provisions of your Lord for you.

Do not separate yourself from the means of grace He is given to uphold and sustain you. He is giving you effectual signs of grace in the gospel sacraments that are to be sure witnesses, to quicken your spirit, to strengthen you in your pilgrimage journey in this world until He brings you home to a celestial city.

[30:36] He is giving you all that you need and He has promised to hold you fast. Christ. And so as you feel your heart hardened or as you feel doubt and the cares and the worries of the world weigh on you, turn your heart over to Jesus.

Among the twelve, their struggle didn't cease at this, just their story. They continue in doubt. But we're told later in the gospel that Jesus says, I prayed for you.

But here's a warning. The twelve are an example and a warning to us. Because one of them was close to Jesus and yet his heart was calloused.

So calloused that even as he saw all that he saw, he didn't submit in faith to Jesus Christ. And the other eleven, it wasn't because of their superior faith.

It isn't because they were astounding paragons of courage. They also deserted Jesus. But what was the thing that kept them? It is ultimately that even in their weakness, they did not run away from their Lord and Savior.

[32:04] They remained in him. They trusted him. and he held them fast. And he will hold you as well.

If you come to him and you remain in him. Let us pray. Lord, we confess that our hearts are because of the cares of the world, because of our old nature of sin, God, we war in our flesh against the new life that you've given us.

We're sometimes prone to hardened hearts, to calloused hearts, to doubt, to unbelief. And so we pray, help our unbelief, Lord.

Help us to come to an end of ourselves and submit wholly to you. And help us lay hands upon your promises that as we do so, you will keep us, you will sustain us, you will continue to feed us in your body and blood and through your word until that day when you come to take us home.

pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you.