

John 6

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Date: 10 November 2019

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I've noticed that something about large bodies of water has a way of instilling a sense of fear and vulnerability.

Anyone else ever notice that? I remember my cousin once talking about his first experience with the ocean, and it made an impression on me.

So he is an honest guy, so as unlikely as the story might sound, I trust that what he told me is true. He was at the beach with his family and preparing to get into the ocean for the first time, which, of course, is something he was thinking of as a personal milestone.

He had not set foot into the ocean prior to adulthood. So, the moment comes, he wades into the surf up to his ankles, and immediately something bites his foot.

[2:04] That first experience being not so positive, he decides to give the ocean another try during that trip. He wades out into the water, only to have an encounter with a manatee.

Yep. An encounter which leaves him covered in manatee snot. He tells me that at that point he went back to the hotel pool and stayed there for the rest of the trip.

I have had a similar but significantly less disgusting experience in my own life. Once I was kayaking in the ocean with a friend out of the outer banks of North Carolina.

Long story short, we ended up being surrounded by a bunch of dolphins. Now, your reaction, as it turns out, if that happens to you, isn't an immediate sense of wonder. That you're with dolphins.

This is great.

It's the terror that comes with seeing large fins sticking out of the water very near to you. Your first thought is likely to be that you're encountering jaws, not that you're encountering flipper.

[3:10] Large bodies of water can be scary places. They are sometimes dangerous. They can seem mysterious, unknowable.

It causes us to feel a sense of vulnerability when we experience them, at least under certain circumstances. And that basic reality of human experience, I think, is central for the setting of this morning's passage.

So these few verses speak not just to the fears of the disciples and the boat, I'm convinced, but also to our fears.

And in so doing, this passage points us to Jesus. Look with me at John chapter 6, if you would.

Start in at verse 16. We read, When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. So we see our setting falling into place. If you remember from the last sermon in this series, Jesus withdrew by himself after the miraculous feeding of the crowd of 5,000, perceiving that the crowd was going to try to make him king by force.

[4:38] So the disciples are without Jesus. They get into the boat across the Sea of Galilee. John notes that it's dark, which may or may not be symbolism, pointing out that Jesus is the light, and that without him, there is darkness.

But in any case, the darkness ends up contributing to the terror that the disciples would end up experiencing. As is what we read about in verse 18, that the sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing.

So, the disciples are out on rough water in the dark. It's frightening enough for everyone, for anyone, right?

But keep in mind, in the Jewish worldview that the disciples would have held, the sea represented the chaotic, terrifying, elemental abyss, right?

And John's account of this event doesn't go into great detail about the fear that the disciples experienced, but it's a central part of what's happening here. Indeed, we read that when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.

[6:03] So they see someone walking on the water. I don't think that's a common experience. Is it really any surprise that they were frightened? Sometimes when we read the Gospels, we're tempted to look at the behavior of the disciples and to think that they look absolutely ridiculous, right?

It seems perfectly reasonable to be afraid in this kind of situation. I don't know about you, but seeing someone walk on water is not an experience I have a reference point for.

Throw in the darkness, the rough waters. It's a scary situation. But in the midst of a frightening situation, what happens?

Jesus speaks, right? He says, It is I. Do not be afraid. The presence of Jesus ends up utterly transforming the situation, right?

We can imagine the relief that the disciples must have felt knowing Jesus is now with them and that it was Jesus walking on the water and not some spirit.

[7:19] We read in our passage, Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. Now there's some scholarly debate about what is meant by immediately here, which boils down to a question of how immediately.

Some take it to mean that Jesus miraculously got the boat to the shore right away. It was another miracle that he performed. On the other hand, we could mean that they made it to the shore without any further issues once Jesus joined them.

In either case, what we see for sure is that the presence of Jesus carries them through this very frightening and potentially very dangerous situation.

This morning's passage is really interesting, I think, because Jesus speaks only a few words. But the passage tells us so much about Jesus, I think.

In addition, the setting for this morning's passage is very specific. On the Sea of Galilee in rough weather.

[8:38] You and I have not been in that specific situation. I'm making some assumptions here. Raymond, maybe you have. You seem to have been everywhere in Israel. No? Always proud of that.

All right. But there is application for us to be found. How so? Well, let's think about what's going on in this short passage.

First, let's think about the disciples without Jesus. It's not stated as directly in John's account of this event as it is elsewhere.

But the disciples are in trouble. It's dark. The water is rough. They are struggling. And then Jesus shows up.

Jesus is present. And given the way that this passage resolves, it's clear that the presence of Jesus is precisely what they needed.

[9:42] I'm reminded that it's easy for us to forget just how much we need the presence of Jesus with us.

I think that we understand that we need Jesus when we think about our salvation, and of course we do. We need the forgiveness that only comes through faith in His shed blood.

We need the victory over death that He won for all who put their trust in Him. But we need His presence in our daily lives. We need to rely on Jesus in every area of our lives.

So when we are thinking about how we parent our children, with one at toddler age, I think about that often these days. We need to ask Jesus to be with us and to guide us.

When we're going about our daily work, we need to ask Jesus to be with us and to guide us. When we wake up in the morning, we need to ask Jesus to be with us and to guide us.

[11:01] when we prepare for sleep at night, we need to ask Jesus to be with us and to guide us.

We need the presence of Jesus at every moment in every situation. We certainly need the presence of Jesus when we are tempted to be afraid.

Which brings me to my next point for this morning. Jesus tells the disciples not to be afraid. His presence drives out fear.

And that is such an important thing. Because Jesus calls us not to be afraid as well. It's easy to be afraid, isn't it?

It's really easy. You know, I open up the newspaper, which I know is not a very millennial thing of me to do, but I'm fine with upsetting expectations.

[12:09] Or I check the news. Or I spend time on social media. And it all feels like this unending series of loud voices shouting at us, telling us to be afraid.

And Jesus says, don't be afraid. If the world shouts at us, be afraid, our response is this, no! I will not be afraid.

Because my Savior, Jesus, is Lord of all. He is reigning at His Father's right hand in glory. What reason do I have to be afraid? Death is defeated.

The devil has lost the fight. My sins are forgiven. What can this world throw at us that can rob us of the victory that we have in Christ?

The victory that He has won on our behalf. What can this world throw at us that can rob us of the victory we have in Christ Jesus?

[13:24] The answer is nothing. Don't be afraid. Just as Jesus brought His disciples safely to shore, He can bring you and He can bring me safely home as well.

Don't be afraid. Which brings me to our next point for this morning. Remember, beyond the natural fear that any one of us would have felt in their position, the disciples were particularly frightened of the sea.

Which, as I mentioned earlier, they would have thought of as chaotic, terrifying, unknowable. To see Jesus walking on the water in those kind of conditions would have made a profoundly theological statement to them.

Because He is demonstrating that He is the Lord of the sea. He is demonstrating His power, His might, and His divinity.

He is demonstrating that He has authority over the water, over nature, over things that might look chaotic or terrifying. You and I might not find ourselves in literal rough and chaotic waters.

[15:05] Although we might, we never know. Maybe some of you have. But life sure can be rough and chaotic in the way it feels. Can't it? I mean, let's be real.

We wake up every day with absolutely no certain idea of what the day ahead is going to bring. We wake up to the reality that for all we know, the day ahead might be our last day in the world.

We wake up with the knowledge that the day ahead may bring us tremendous joy. it may bring us tragic loss.

It often seems rough. It always seems unpredictable. It can feel chaotic. These fragile lives of ours. And these lives of ours are fragile, aren't they? things like that. It's not It's not It's not It's not It's not It's not true. It's not It's not true. But the same Jesus who walked on rough and chaotic waters and reassured his disciples, he also reassures us.

[16:21] So no matter what the day or the week or the month or the year or the decade ahead is going to bring, we can be sure of this.

Jesus will never forsake us. The one who walked on water. walks with us now.

He is present in our lives and in the midst of life's uncertainties. And there are so, so many of them. We can always count on him.

Listen to his voice today. Let's all listen to his voice, brothers and sisters. He is calling us to trust him. And that's no matter how rough the waters might appear.

The darkness can seem thick. The wind can be blowing hard. The waters can look rough. And in spite of all of that, Jesus is telling us, don't be afraid.

[17:39] Don't Don't Don't Praise the Lord for the gift that we have in our Savior, Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.