

The Presence We Need

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. It's a glorious day. I feel like we got a taste of spring. We'll be tasting it for the next four months, in and out.
- If you're new to Connecticut this year, welcome to Connecticut. I don't know if any of you are sailors. I would not call myself a true sailor, but I grew up with the privilege of sailing on little boats, sunfish usually, in little ponds in Massachusetts, and then on the shore of Lake Erie.
- And I've told you some. If you've been here for a while, you've heard a little bit about the house that our family has on the north shore of Lake Erie. And there was one day that is remarkable. And forgive me if I've already told this story once, but I'm going to tell it again.
- I was probably about 10 or 11, and me and my two older brothers, so I was 10 or 11, they were 13 and 15, got onto this old sunfish with a little bit of a leak, so it was a bit of a waterlogged hull, and the rudder had a problem that if there was too much stress on it, it would pop out and lose grip in the water.
- But we decided on this beautiful day with a strong prevailing southwest wind on Lake Erie, which if you're on the north shore, creates lots of waves, probably two or three foot waves.
- [1 : 3 5] We decided, what a great day to go sailing. And so we put on our life jackets, we hopped on the boat, three of us on a sunfish, which if you know a sunfish, that's full.
- There's no more extra room after that. And headed out across the bay. And we got out through the breakers and out into the swells, and my brother, who's at the back, said, all right, ready about hard to lee.
- And he pushed the rudder over, and the boat started to swerve. And then it stopped. And then the wind hit the sail, and it got pushed back onto its course again.
- And we kept trying. And the wind blew, and the waves pushed. And again and again, we got pushed back. And we, back onto the track that we were.
- We even tried, my brother even tried, getting out of the boat and swimming the bow around. But with the wind and the waves, we were in trouble.
- [2 : 4 4] We had visions of sailing down Niagara River, wondering what happens when you get to Niagara Falls in a sailboat. Friends, sometimes our lives can feel like the headwinds and the waves are pretty strong, can't they?
- Sometimes the circumstances of our lives feel like the waves are pounding, and the winds are relentless, and we are weary, and we don't know whether we have what we need to keep going.
- What do we need the most in these circumstances? Well, we are in a series in the book of Mark, and we are continuing to read through the gospel of Mark so that we might see Jesus more clearly.
- And our passage points us to what God thinks is the answer to that question of what do we need most. So, if you want to turn in your pew Bibles, it's page 791.

We're in Mark chapter 6, starting in verse 45. And just as you turn there, remember that this is right on the heels of Jesus, miraculously feeding 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread.

[4 : 04] So, they had just seen God do something amazing, and there was a large crowd there, and it must have been pretty exciting. So, Mark chapter 6, verse 45.

Immediately, he 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. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was strong against them.

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 them by. 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. But immediately he spoke and said to them, he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I.

[5 : 15] Do not be afraid. And 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.

And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran around the whole region and began to bring sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was.

And wherever he came in villages, cities, and countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Friends, let's pray together. God, as we come to this passage this morning, we pray that you would give us, by your Holy Spirit, fresh eyes. Fresh eyes and soft hearts and sharp minds.

Lord, so that we might see the truth here, so that we might understand it rightly, so that we might receive it from you. God, I pray for your help this morning. Help me to speak your word as I ought, that it might be a blessing to all of us.

[6 : 30] And may we together this morning sit under your word, we pray. Oh, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. So as we look at this account, we're going to look at four things.

So here's your outline for those who are outline takers. We're going to look at the disciples' situation. We're going to look at Jesus' plan. Then we're going to look at Jesus' words. And we're going to look at our response.

So let's look through this and think about it together. First, the disciples' situation. Now remember what we've just heard and seen, what came before this.

They had seen Jesus do amazing things, right? They had just gone out earlier in chapter 6. They went out on a mission. And they themselves not only proclaimed the kingdom of God, but saw the kingdom of God as people were healed and demons were cast out.

They had come back and they had seen Jesus miraculously turn five loaves of fish into a Chick-fil-A on a Sunday afternoon, feeding thousands of people.

[7 : 37] They were also weary. If you remember, they went away. They went on the mission. They came back. They tried to go away to the mountains for rest. And the crowd found them there.

And that's why Jesus had to feed them because they were supposed to be away from the crowds. And they're weary from their mission, weary from the work that they had.

And Jesus knew this. And so Jesus said, boys, get in the boat. Get in the boat. Go to the other side. I'll meet you over there. But what would have normally been a fairly short and doable journey became difficult.

Right? In the middle of the night, they were still out on the sea facing headwinds. And they were wearied. Maybe in that moment, they wondered, had God abandoned them?

So the disciples, having seen great things, but now weary of the work and facing a challenging situation. Maybe you find yourself somewhere like this today.

[8 : 46] Maybe there are headwinds that you were facing this morning. Maybe your labor at home, the endless demands of caring for young kids, becoming overwhelming.

Maybe the whirlwind of juggling your career and home responsibilities feels like an unending rat race. Maybe you are in the process of feeling the wearying effect of aging and the ongoing capacity challenge of figuring out, what can I do and how can I continue to live and serve?

Maybe some of you are facing cultural resistance and pushback for your life choices and living out your convictions in the world. Some of you may be drained and weary from your work here at church, the weariness of pouring out your life in love for others.

Some of you are facing physical suffering of various kinds and are exhausted because of it. Some of you know the incredible exhaustion of relational trials, of broken relationships, of conflict, unresolved, hard work, trying to work through them.

The disciples face their headwinds. We face ours. And Jesus has a plan. Jesus has a plan for them, but it is not the plan that we most want them to see.

[10 : 14] So what Jesus did, right, he saw them with the crowd and he sent them away, right? He wasn't interested in them being able to bask in the glory of feeding the 5,000. He's like, okay, boys, we're done.

Go. Right? And he sends them into a storm. And Jesus isn't dumb. He knows that the storm might, that the wind might come up. In fact, it was fairly well known.

If you're a fisherman on, on the Sea of Galilee, that at night, there was a strong wind that would often come up at sundown. So he knew what he was sending them into. And, and he did it anyway.

Just a side note, we ought not to be surprised by the headwinds in our lives. For Jesus told us that this would happen. In this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.

He said to his disciples, he said to the crowds, all you who are weary and heavy laden, knowing that this weariness and burden bearing will be a part of life in this world.

[11 : 17] Do not be surprised when you face these various trials. But Jesus sent them out where he knows they will face a difficulty. And instead of going with them or even warning them, he goes in another direction.

He goes up onto a mountain to pray. Because Jesus knows that his greatest need in that moment is to go be with his heavenly father. Jesus often did this after big events.

And he shows his dependence on God, the father, as he, the incarnate son of God walks the earth. So Mark tells this story. They're out on the boat.

He's up on the mountain. He comes down. It appears. It's not clear exactly where he is. It says, evening came, and he saw them out on the water and that they were having difficulty. But remarkably, even then, he does not rush to their aid.

We often read this story and we think, this is a rescue story. Jesus is going to go rescue the floundering disciples. It's not a rescue story. Right?

[12 : 25] Jesus stays on the shore until the three in the morning, it seems. Right? He doesn't go immediately to them. He waits. And why is this?

Look with me at verse 48. If you're looking at your Bible, I'll read it again. And he saw that they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them.

And about the fourth watch of the night, that's kind of between three and six in the morning, so near the end of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them.

What does that mean? But what it does mean, very clearly, is that he didn't come to rescue them. He had another intention. He meant to pass by them.

What could that mean? It could mean he's just like, well, I can walk on water, I'm going to go to the other side and I'll see you guys there, you'll be fine. I don't think that's it. I don't think that's what it is.

[13 : 30] I think that there's an echo here from the Old Testament, actually, that's really helpful. Passing by was something that God did in particular circumstances when he wanted to reveal himself in a particular personal way to his servants.

So in 1 Kings 19, Elijah thought he was alone fighting against the prophets of Baal in the brokenness of Israel. God comes to him and he passes by him.

Maybe most famously, in Exodus 33, Moses is meeting with God up on Mount Sinai. God was sending Moses to lead his people and Moses says, God, you've got to show me your glory.

And this is what Exodus 33, 18 says. Moses says, please show me your glory. And the Lord says, listen carefully to it for it. I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord.

And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But he said, you cannot see my face for a man shall not see me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock.

[14 : 49] And while my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

Friends, this is what Jesus is doing. Just as Moses then in chapter 34 that we read earlier, heard God and saw the backside of his glory and heard the pronouncement of what kind of God he was, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

So Jesus intended to pass by in order to show his glory to his disciples. How did he do this? Well, he walked on water.

So I want to stop here for a minute because if we've read Bible stories, if you've grown up in church, you just think, oh yeah, he walked on water, whatever, that's a bit nothing. He walked on water.

What does that mean? It means that to the disciples who were fighting against the wind and the waves, he was the Lord of the wind and the waves.

[16 : 02] He created the molecules. He was able to make them solid so that his feet would not sink but stand on that water. And in the face of the waves that crashed around him, he comes unhindered.

In the face of the wind that blow, it has no power over him because Jesus didn't come simply to rescue them. He came to show them who he was, that he had created all of this world that these disciples were navigating.

He wanted to show that he was not only the creator but the sustainer of all nature. And yes, he walked on water. It is a supernatural thing and some of us are scientists here and we wrestle with, how can that be?

But here's the thing. When the creator of all things, when the creator of the natural world steps into that creation, he is still a supernatural being.

He is above those things and he is the Lord over them. And this is what Jesus is showing his disciples as he walks on water, intending to pass them by so that they could see.

[17 : 15] Do you see these headwinds? Do you feel these waves? I am the Lord of all of them. Jesus wants them to see what the apostle Paul later writes about Jesus, that he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

By him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities or winds or waves. That's an expansion of the passage. Winds or waves, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things and in him all things hold together. This is what Jesus wanted them to see. Right?

Jesus wanted them to see that he was the Lord over all of it. And the amazing thing is he didn't come and make the wind stop and the waves stop immediately, did he?

That wasn't his intention. Friends, how often do we just want God to step in in order to fix our problems? We think if only this would be taken away, if only this would be provided, if this part of my circumstances could change, then I could keep going.

[18 : 35] But God has something better for us than that. He has himself. But the disciples don't see Jesus clearly. Rather than seeing him in his power and being encouraged and refreshed, they see him.

In verse 48, 49, what are they? They're filled with fear. They're terrified. They cry out, it's a ghost. And so in compassion, Jesus, who was intending to pass them by to display his glory, speaks a word to them.

So we've seen the disciples' situation. We've seen Jesus' plan to display himself to them. Now we hear his words. What great words they are for the weary, exhausted disciples to hear.

Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. And look, even at this point, he hasn't calmed the winds and the waves.

Right? What he's saying is, what you most need, what you really need, is me. Take heart, friends. Don't lose that heart because I am with you.

[19 : 52] You don't need to be afraid that I'm something else. You don't need to be afraid that you're alone in this. I know you're weary, but I am here. I know you're terrified, but it is I.

And friends, every Jewish reader hearing Jesus say, it is I, couldn't fail but hear the echoes again of Moses in the book of Exodus as he was out on the backside of Midian tending sheep, and he saw a bush that was burned but not consumed, and God spoke to him in that moment, and he said, Moses, I am calling you to go and be the one who will deliver my people from Egypt.

And when Moses says, I don't even know who you are, God says, I am. I am that I am. And this is what it would sound like to the ears of these Jewish fishermen as they would resound with this remembrance that Jesus is saying, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I am the God of the universe, but I'm also the God of your people. And I am here. And because I am here, you don't need to be afraid.

The disciples might have wondered, and maybe you wonder too. Okay, so they're in the boat. The wind is still blowing. The waves are still crashing. How is this good news that Jesus is there?

[21 : 33] Because what Jesus brings in his person is even better than what he does with our circumstances. Friends, this is the very heart of the gospel.

This is the very heart of what we believe as Christians. That the one who revealed himself as Lord over all the physical universe, he is also the one who created the spiritual universe as well.

He knows all of the dynamics of what it would be for us as spiritual beings to be rightly related to God. And he knows that the greatest storm in our life is not our circumstances.

It's not the things outside of us, but it's the things inside of us. It is the storm of our sin that rages in our hearts that most threatens us.

Our lust for power, for pleasure, for love, for belonging, for meaning, that's gone wrong as we sought to do it apart from God. The self that rises up against its creator and says, I don't need you.

[22 : 42] The spirit of Adam and Eve that said, I would rather be God in my own life than trust God, the one who is. Jesus knows that this is the greatest storm and this storm brings destruction and death into our hearts.

And he knows that it would provoke a right and perfectly good God to bring judgment upon our hearts because of it. But just like the disciples as they're facing their storm, Jesus comes to us in this spiritual storm.

This is what he has done as he has come and shown his love by taking on human form, by walking with us and most importantly, by going through the storm of the crucifixion and death that he endured on the cross.

It is there as he enters into that storm for us in our place that we see his glory, that we see the greatness of his mercy and grace, his justice and righteousness married together in the death of Jesus so that the righteousness of God might be vindicated, so that the goodness of creation might be restored and so that we might be saved out of this storm.

God and his greatest act is not any of these miracles that he did while he walked on earth. His greatest act is that three days later, he rose from the dead.

[24 : 16] Friends, think about how beautiful this is because death is both a spiritual and a physical reality and when Jesus rose from the dead, he said, I am Lord of all of it and I am the conqueror over it.

no longer will death have sway in this world because I have risen from the dead. He rose so that he might demonstrate that he is the Lord over that and he comes to us and he says, it is I, do not be afraid.

When you are joined with me, you are joined with me by faith into my death and into my resurrection and the storm of sin is no longer yours because I have taken it on myself and instead, you have new life.

You have peace with God. So when Jesus says the greatest thing we have is to be with, for us, the greatest need that we have is for us to be with Jesus, it is because when we are with Jesus by faith, we have this salvation and we have this hope and we have this great assurance that we are his and just like he holds the winds and the waves in the palm of his hand, he holds us in the palm of his hand.

And so Jesus in compassion looks at the disciples and he says, it is I, do not be afraid and he gets in the boat and the wind ceases. So that's Jesus' words answering the question, what is our greatest need?

[26 : 05] It is I, Jesus says. So the final part of this passage provokes the question, what will our response be? You know, it's fascinating when you look at verse 51.

Kunle and I were talking about this last week. It feels like Mark is a little harsh on the disciples, right? When he got in the boat with them, the winds ceased and they were utterly astounded for they did not understand about the loaves but their hearts were hardened.

The disciples' hearts in this moment are exposed. They see Jesus but they don't understand. They are astounded and that astounded is not simply amazed.

It's also confused and doubting. The word actually means being outside of oneself. They're like, I can't wrap my head around this. I don't know how to, I don't know how to understand this and I don't know how to submit to it.

So here's a fascinating little challenge for those of you who are Bible scholars. When you look at the parallel story in Matthew, Matthew 14, what happens at this point is Peter says, if it's really you, tell me to walk on water and he walks out and then he looks at the winds and the waves and he doubts and Jesus has to pull him out of the water.

[27 : 19] But at the end of that, it says, when he got into the boat, they fell down and worshipped him and says, surely this is the son of God. Although Matthew makes it very clear that even when they confess that, they don't really understand what that means.

Because two chapters later in chapter 16, he'll start talking to them about the cross and they're like, no, no, no, it can't be that way. What are you talking about, Jesus? So they still don't understand, right?

Mark waits for the confession to come much later. It actually happens in chapter 15 and it's in the mouth not of the disciples but of a Roman centurion who watches Jesus hang on the cross and he says, surely this was the son of God.

But Matthew and Mark really are saying the same thing though they're telling the story in a slightly different way. The people during Jesus' life saw him but they didn't understand him.

They called him Lord but they did not receive him for who he truly is. They didn't understand what the loaves were. Right?

[28 : 26] They had seen his lordship in so many ways healing the sick, casting out demons, calming the storm, multiplying food. Do you ever think, you know, it would be so much easier for me to believe in Jesus if he were here?

If I could touch him, if I could see him, if I could watch him do? I've thought that, right? Golly, like it's hard to believe Jesus that I haven't seen but if I saw him, man, I would believe.

Well, the Bible will tell us otherwise. The Bible tells us no instead. Even those who saw him did not believe. They did not understand and we don't need to kid ourselves thinking that we would be better than them.

How often do we see him and not truly accept him? The testimony of Scripture is one of the places we can go to address this.

This book is a written, ongoing revelation of who God is and who Jesus is in particular. So I point you towards it.

[29 : 36] Study it, read it, meditate. If you're here and you're figuring out what do I think about Christianity? I don't understand what it means in the world. Look here first. Look at Jesus in the Gospels.

That's the place to start. But don't only look there but also think about the testimony in your own lives. How many times have you seen God at work? Make sure you keep an eye out for Bonnie's testimony because I know it and it's really cool.

God worked in her life in some amazing ways to help her understand and come to faith in Jesus. What finally helped the disciples most of all was that when they, when Jesus rose from the dead they saw him and they were able to testify.

This is he. The one who calmed the winds and the waves has conquered sin and death. It is the resurrected Jesus and this is where you want to focus your thoughts if you're doubting whether Jesus could do any of this.

look at the resurrection of Jesus. If it's not true as Paul says we are fools most to be pitied but if it is true it changes everything and this story makes sense because Jesus rose from the dead.

[30 : 52] So look there and I would be remiss if I didn't say something about verses 53 through 56 because it's a part of our passage.

It's a summary sentence for Mark in some ways he's sort of wrapping up this section but he says they arrive and the crowd gets what the disciples didn't at one level.

Right? Jesus arrives and they recognize him and they're like the healer is here and they're going all over the place pulling the sick bringing the people to wherever he was believing that even if they touched the hem of his garment that his healing power would be expressed and we know that it has worked and that it did work and that Jesus did express his lordship over the physical world in these ways.

But I submit to you that Mark puts this summary in here not to praise the crowds for their understanding of Jesus but to give another example of those who saw Jesus but didn't truly get him because they came to Jesus for what they could get from him.

And the message of this passage is it is the presence of Jesus not what he gives us that is the most important thing for us. At the end of day on Lake Erie I'm thankful my parents pay attention.

[32 : 24] They rushed around getting the motorboat into the water they pattered out into through the waves threw a rope to us and towed us in. We are thankful for their saving that day.

They came out to us in order to save us. And friends as you face the storms of the circumstances of your life for sure but even more so of the sin in your heart Jesus invites you to see him and to believe in him.

let's pray together. Lord Jesus we ask this morning that you would be Lord in working in our hearts.

Lord show us where we may be unbelieving. Lord some of us may be familiar with these stories and with the account of Jesus but Lord have never truly believed in faith and trusted in this one to be the savior of our souls.

Lord some of us here this morning may be exploring and trying to figure out who is this Jesus and why is he so important to some. How do I understand who he truly is?

[33 : 49] Lord some of us Lord we may we may know much much about this Jesus and yet still find places in our hearts where we are unwilling to let him be the Lord over our lives.

Lord I pray I pray this morning that for all of us that you would help us to see you as you truly are and Lord in seeing you that we would believe and embrace you knowing that your presence is the greatest treasure of our of our lives.

Lord you are worthy of our faith of our lives and of our worship this morning. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.