

SERMON TEXT FOR TODAY IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 6TH CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

In order to properly understand today's Gospel, we have to look at what happened just before our reading begins. Immediately before today's reading, a crowd had gathered around Jesus, He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to them many things. He then fed 5,000 men, plus the women and children, with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.

We see a progression: Jesus sees troubled people. He speaks His Word. And then, he gives them a sign that His Word is true; that it can be trusted. This is how Jesus cheers His troubled people – His Word and a sign that His Word is true.

Which brings us to our lesson this morning. Immediately after Jesus fed the 5,000 men, plus the women and children -- with the five loaves and two fish, with leftovers, by the way -- He immediately "made His disciples get into the ark and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida" (v. 45). Notice the word there? "Made". Why would Jesus compel His disciples to sail ahead on a sunset cruise across the Sea of Galilee, while He went up on the mountain to pray?

And, notice what happened to the twelve as the sailed in their little ark. While Jesus prayed on the mountain, their pleasure cruise didn't turn out to be quite as pleasurable as the expected. We are not told if the wind came up suddenly or gradually went from a cool, quiet breeze to tornado, but Mark tells us, "they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them" (v. 48).

What were the disciples thinking in their little ark? We are not told what their thoughts were, what their conversation was, but we can do a pretty good job of filling in the blanks: "Woe is me. Why me, Lord? What have I ever done to deserve this? Why are you doing this, Jesus? Where are you, Jesus?"

It's pretty easy for us to fill in the blanks on their thoughts and conversation because ... well because, they are human beings, and that means they are by nature sinful and unclean. And, being dead in sin by their very nature means they have egos, and their egos cause them to look at themselves, to naval gaze.

Know what? You are by nature sinful and unclean, and that means you have an ego. And, your ego causes you to naval gaze, especially when the wind is against you. Whether it be death or debt, or that co-worker who got the promotion you thought was yours; when you've heard those words from the doctor, "there's something wrong with your child"; when that procedure or biopsy shows you are the "1" in 1,000; when you hear from your spouse, or maybe I should say read the text, that says "I don't love you anymore".

What is your reaction? "Woe is me. Why me, Lord? What have I ever done to deserve this? Why are you doing this, Jesus? Where are you, Jesus?"

The disciples are despairing. There they are, in their little ark. They got into that ark just after supper, and it is now the 4th watch of the night, which means it is now between 3-6 AM. They've been in that little ark for about 10 hours. They are sheep without a shepherd. They are helpless. They are in trouble and tribulation, and they can do nothing – absolutely nothing – about it.

Where is Jesus? He did not just suggest to them, or ask them to get in the ark, He made them, He compelled them, to set sail on their sunset cruise. He prayers on the mountain. "And He saw that that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the 4th watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea" (v. 48).

Dear Child of God, you have found yourself in the deep waters of despair. Just like the disciples, you doubt and doubt leads to despair.

And the TRUTH of our lesson is this: Jesus made, He compelled, the twelve to sail into that tribulation and – here is the hard part that we cannot wrap our human reason around -- He sent them into that tribulation on purpose. Not because He hates them; not because they have done something wrong; but to refine them, as one would refine gold in a blazing

fire; in order to prune them as a good gardener does to the branches of his tree.

Our Lord Jesus knows all about tribulation. He Himself walk into the greatest tribulation of all. He came from the glory of heaven to be born of virgin mother and willingly allowed Himself to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, beaten, whipped, crowned with thorns, nailed to a wooden instrument of death. He did that for you, Dear Child of God, so that you would have the greatest gift of all – the forgiveness of your sins, and where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation. His blood, shed all over the wood of that cross, washes away all of your sin. Oh, to be sure, the devil meant that tribulation for evil, but God meant it for good – your good. Your forgiveness. Your deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Your salvation.

Mark records the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel for us this day: “Immediately He spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid’” (v. 50). “And He got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased”.

Have you trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? (cf. *LSB* 770:2). Dear Child of God, Jesus sees you in your tribulation. He knows your despair and understands your helplessness. So, He does not abandon you, but He comes to you and speaks, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

He says that to you in words like these, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Take, eat; this is My Body. Take and drink, this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus comes to you to forgive you of your doubt and despair, to give you courage for the facing of the hours of tribulation, to strengthen you, so that in your Good Shepherd attending you, His rod and staff comforting and cheering you, so that you want, you lack, nothing.

In the sermon this morning, you may have heard that Mark says Jesus made the disciples get into the “boat,” but in the sermon I have used the word ARK. The word means the same thing – boat, ship, ark. I use the word “ark” quite purposefully so that you recall Noah. Like the twelve, God compelled Noah to get into the ark and sent him and his family into tribulation. How’d that work out for Noah? Remember how the story

ended? Just like it ended for the twelve – the wind and waves ceased, they stepped foot on dry ground, safely on firm ground. God, in His mercy, allows you to sail into the tribulation of earthly life, just like He did Noah and the disciples, to teach you that you are weak, but He is strong.

When your pleasure cruise doesn't turn out to be as pleasurable as you expected; when you find yourself in the depth of despair; when you find yourself frightened and scared like a little lamb-ie without a shepherd, you know the devil will come with all of his lies. But, you also know your Good Shepherd will have compassion on you and enter into that tribulation for you and with you. He will speak His Word to you and give you the visible sign of the Sacraments so that you know His Word us true and you can trust it. And He will shepherd you to heaven, where before the throne of God there is a sea of glass, like crystal (cf Rev 4:6). That is because there is no wind and waves to frighten you, no tribulation, no tears, because there is no sin, and God will wipe all the tears from your eyes.