

Mark 6:45-52

If you saw a friend all beat up, cuts and bruises on their face, arm in a sling, leg in a cast, and you asked, "Who did this to you?" you would expect to be given the name of a thug, an enemy perhaps. You would be shocked to be informed that a loved one did this to them.

Yet this is what we see in our text for today. The disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee. It turns out to be a very horrific ordeal. They come ashore exhausted, stressed, looking like they've been in some type of a battle. And if anyone were to ask them, "Who did this to you?" their answer would be, "He did! Jesus did this to us!"

And they would be correct. After feeding the five thousand, Jesus "*made His disciples,*" it says, get into the boat and cross over to the other side while He went up on a mountain to pray. Now this right here is a recipe for disaster. The disciples alone...without Jesus. This will not be good. And it's no different today. When we go off and leave Jesus behind, trouble will ensue, every time; trouble that we bring upon ourselves.

But here in Mark 6 Jesus makes His disciples go without Him. And then there's this...It's evening...Jesus is praying, and He sees that His disciples are "*making headway painfully,*" it says, but He waits until the fourth watch of the night to come. That's past three in the morning! He sees that His disciples are taking all night to cross the sea because the wind is against them, but not until the dawn is about to break does He come to them. You want more? He walks on the sea, intending to pass them by. They all see Him and they scream thinking they're seeing a ghost.

All of this makes for one traumatic night for these disciples. And it comes from their loved one; from Jesus Himself. With a friend like Him, as the saying goes, who needs enemies? We could also ask that if Jesus treats His disciples in this manner, how will He treat those who are not His disciples?

Well, let me ask this...how has Jesus been treating you? Has He put you into difficult, even horrific situations, or has He made your life a very pleasant, peaceful journey across to the other side? I hope not the latter, and here's why... The disciples, it says, "*were making headway painfully.*" For the Christian, this is the only way that headway can be made: painfully. If you and I are not making headway *painfully*, then we're not making headway.

Let me explain. The winds were against the disciples, says our text. Now the disciples could have stopped struggling against the wind, and their journey would have become an easy one, for then the wind would not have been against them, but it would have pushed them along. No more painful struggling. Just go where the wind takes them. But that would not have been to the other side.

And also for us. The winds are against us, but that's only because we are Christians; Christians who are trying to please God by how we live; Christians who cling to our Baptism; who have the desire to hear the Word of Christ and to eat and drink His Sacrament faithfully. The wind pushes hard against all who live as Christians in this way. So if we're not struggling against the wind, it's because we're letting the wind push us along. And be sure of this - the winds do not push us

to the other side. They push us away from Christ; away from His church; away from our calling to be faithful Christians.

If you and I are going to make it across to the other side, it will not be an easy journey. No one crosses over into heaven without making headway painfully. Through much tribulation, says the Bible, we enter the kingdom of heaven.

But to all who make this painful headway, Jesus comes. He comes to His disciples in our text. And He comes walking on the water. Think of it. It's dark, early in the morning. The disciples are exhausted. Their minds are also weary. And then they see a figure out on the water. "A *ghost!*" they cry. A spirit and not a man. Now, demons are spirits. "So, as if this night isn't bad enough, they might say, now an enemy, a demonic spirit, a ghost, is walking on the sea next to our boat! Where's Jesus when we need Him? Oh, wait...that's Jesus out on the water. So is He our friend or our enemy?"

That's the question...for them and for us. Jesus is the friend who appears to be the enemy. He put His disciples through this horrific ordeal. He put them against the winds. What friend would do all that? That's how we think; it's how we rationalize. Since Jesus is my friend, He will make my life pleasant. When I pray, He will take my troubles away.

Oh my, do we ever have much to learn. If this was true, the devil would be our friend and Jesus our enemy. In fact, this is how it appears to us. Satan wants to make life easy for us, but Jesus makes our life difficult. But, you see, the devil would have us go with the winds. It's only Jesus who has us travel through life so that the winds are against us.

But He knows those winds very well. They were against Him. They pushed hard. Yet He made it across to the other side. And it wasn't easy for Him. It was through suffering, death on a cross, and resurrection. And this is the life to which we are called. It's a life of suffering because the winds are against us. It's a life lived in our baptism where (and it took place again this morning for our dear little James) we die with Christ and are raised with Him.

Our goal and our hope is to go to the other side. And since the winds are against us all the way, Jesus comes to us. He came to His disciples on the sea. He got in the boat with them, and the winds ceased. Just like that. So here is the truth - He is indeed their friend, for when He is there with them, the wind no longer matters.

"If God is for us," says Romans 8, *"who can be against us?"* When Christ is with you, and in you, let the winds push as hard as they will. You are with Jesus, and so the winds will be as little or nothing to you. Your Jesus is your friend. More than that, He is the one who steers you across to the other side. And you will be there. Nothing can prevent it. Not Satan - he is done. Not sin - you are forgiven; all of you. Not death - Christ is now your life. It matters not who or what is against you. Jesus is for you. He is in our boat. *"Take heart,"* He says to you, *"It is I."* He is in the words entering your ears. He is in the bread and wine in the Sacrament.

With a friend like Jesus, it matters not who is our enemy. Your life, your journey to the other side will not be an easy one; but it will be a blessed one, for you go with Christ, and He goes with you. Amen.