

Mark 6:45-52

We all got in at different times. Some of you have been in for more than eighty years. Some of you, half that long. Some of you got in recently. The boat. I'm speaking of the boat of the church. We're not in our own individual little boats. We're all in the boat together. "*There is one church,*" writes the apostle. Jesus did not put His disciples into twelve little boats and send them off. He put them all in one boat. And you are in that same boat. Jesus put you here just as He did the Twelve. In your baptism Jesus put you here in His boat of the church. It was not our doing. The Twelve would not have gotten into the boat except that Jesus commanded them. And later that night they were surely wondering why He had put them in the boat in the first place. They were struggling. The winds were against them. It was the fourth watch of the night, somewhere between three and six in the morning. And it says, "*they were making headway painfully.*"

That's how it is for us. Why can't the winds ever be on our side? Why do they always have to be against us? There are other boats out there in the water. There's the Mormon boat. They're building one or two churches every day somewhere in the world. They appear to be making good headway. There's the Jehovah Witness' boat. They're not attacked by the winds of persecution. Not anymore. Not like the Christian boat is. We're attacked by the media, by liberals, by Muslims. Christians in our boat are killed by Muslims in many parts of the world just for staying in the Christian boat! Chick-fil-A is under attack. The owner unabashedly answered questions about his beliefs. 'I am a Christian,' he said, 'I hold to traditional marriage.' And now the Boston mayor wants them out of his city. Other boats make headway in the water. Why is it that our boat, just like with the disciples, always makes headway painfully?

It's because Satan is against us. He's not against Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims, and all the other boats out there in the world because they're not Christian. They are not taking their people to heaven. They will perish eventually. But the boat of Jesus' church he is against. He knows where our boat is going. He knows that those sinners who stay in the church; who live in, and breathe in, the air of the Gospel; who feed on Christ's Word and Holy Sacraments--Satan knows that these sinners will make it to heaven. And so he is against us. And so we, in this boat of the church, make headway painfully.

And we in the boat aren't always rowing in the same direction. We get angry at each other. We blame each other. We don't act like Jesus' disciples much of the time. We act like we really don't even want to be in His boat. We don't study His Word much at all. We don't have much of a desire for His Sacrament. We don't call our baptism to mind regularly. We put leftovers, what we can spare, into His offering plate. No wonder we make headway painfully. Not only is Satan against us, we're against each other. We're even against Jesus much of the time. We fight against His Commandments. We don't love Him or our neighbor as we should. That's how the disciples were as well. It says that their hearts were hardened. They had more unbelief than faith in their hearts. And we are just like them. Is it any wonder that Jesus' boat, that His church, in every generation, every age, makes headway painfully?

So what does Jesus do? He comes to His disciples as they are struggling in the boat. He walks on the water toward them. He does not walk past them with the thought in His mind, "You're not worth saving; I want nothing to do with you!" No, He comes to them. He gets into the boat with them. And then, then the winds come to an end. At first they're frightened. 'It's a ghost!' they scream. But right away Jesus speaks to them, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*"

Jesus comes to you also. And the way He comes is just as unbelievable as walking on water. We would not believe it was Jesus any more than the disciples did when they saw Him on the water, except that Jesus speaks faith into our hearts as He did for them. There are those who claim He is nothing but a ghost. 'It's not really Jesus,' they say. But it is Him. In bread and wine He comes to you today. He is no longer up on the mountain praying; He is really and truly present here in the Sacrament for you. Like His disciples back then, our eyes cannot make Him out either. And so He speaks to you as He did to them. *"Take eat,"* He says to you, *"Take drink, this is My body...My blood, given and shed for you for the remission of your sins."*

You see, He knows that within our hearts we are crying out in fear just as His disciples did in the boat. We're afraid because we have sinned greatly. Sinned against Him and against others. We deserve only His punishment. We do not deserve to be loved. Not us, not the way we have acted in our thoughts, with our words, with our deeds. And so we hesitate even to come to worship Him. We hesitate to come up to His Holy Supper. We hesitate to pour over His words and study them deeply. We have so many fears, for we are terrible sinners.

"It is I," He says to you, *"Do not be afraid."* It's the same Jesus who was born as a tiny baby in a manger for you who comes to you here today walking on the water. It's the same Jesus who opened His arms on a cross and died for you who comes to you today. He does love you. He is not angry with you because of your sins. Friend, He forgives you. That's why He tells you to not be afraid. He holds no whip in His hands to punish you with. The only things in His hands are the marks of the nails--His wounds which declare His love for you.

When Jesus got into the boat with His disciples, the winds stopped. Will they stop also for you? Yes, because with Jesus in your boat; with Jesus on your side; with Jesus for you, *"who can be against us!"* It doesn't matter. Let Satan howl. Let the world do what it will. Jesus is for you. You are in His boat. Even your sins cannot prevent Jesus. You are forgiven. All your sins are forgiven.

Jesus' boat is the only boat in the water that is going to heaven. Not because the people in this boat are better than the people in all the other boats. We're just as sinful as all of them. We're just as worthless. But here in Jesus' boat you live in His forgiveness. Here there is mercy, here is the love of God. Here is Christ in Word and in Sacrament for you. Let the winds howl. Who cares! Jesus is here with you and for you. You're on your way to heaven! Amen.