

Sermon: What We Can Learn from Jesus' Ministry

Text: Matthew 14:22-36

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: Three of the gospels have this account of Jesus trying to dispel fear in the lives of the disciples. This is a very unusual passage in that it shows Jesus coming to minister to the disciples (church). Usually it is the reverse, i.e. Jesus and His disciples are seen ministering to the lost. Sometimes leaders are also graced by God's presence, as is the case here. It was always Jesus' mission to reveal himself as God and to demonstrate love in everything.

Matthew 14:22-36 (NIV) ²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." ³⁴When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

In our story, there are three actions that occur even today that really are a mirror image of Jesus' entire ministry.

I. Jesus Shows Himself to the Church.

Key Text: "But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'" (Matthew 14:27)

A. Through people

One of the biggest misconceptions about Christians is that they always have it all together. Just like other people we sometimes doubt, are overcome with fear and fail at being Christ-like. A quick review of the gospel of Matthew shows that Peter is mentioned in 24 different verses. In 11 out of 24 he is doing the wrong thing, or saying the wrong thing, i.e. missing the mark. Here is a person who seems to have almost a 50% chance of doing the wrong thing at any given time. Ultimately, he fails at walking on water even with Jesus' help and presence. But in just two more chapters Peter is also the man to whom Jesus would say:

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18)

We are a lot like Peter most days, capable of great endeavors or huge disappointments. (Elaborate)

B. Through the ordinances

For the Christian Church there are two ordinances given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not always recognize Jesus in our midst, yet He is always here. When we are threatened by health or circumstances either personal or financial, Jesus is always near. We should not be terrified nor confuse Jesus with someone else like the early disciples.

It was two of the disciples who on their way to Emmaus recognized Jesus as he spoke to them and broke bread with them. I would hope today when you took communion that Jesus was felt to be present in a real sense even though you did not see Him with your physical eyes.

And does it not say that those who are baptized are buried with Christ? And also those who have been baptized have put on Christ?

When we have opportunities to see Jesus with us, I hope we do experience his presence and are able to discern what it is we are doing.

C. Through difficult situations

You might remember there was another time there was apparent danger out on the lake, yet this time Jesus was asleep in the boat with His disciples. Jesus talks to the sea waves as if they were demons. Quiet! Be Still!

Another story is also found in [Mark 4:35-41](#). Grace Noll Crowell wrote this poem:

When the seas in your life run high and wild,
And your spirit is tempest tossed,
And fright is a clutching, clamoring thing
As you fear you will be lost,
Go waken the Christ who calmly lies
Asleep in the ship's dark hold.

And he will arise as once he did,
And speak as he did of old,
Stretching his arms above the waves
Bidding the tempest cease –
He will utter a clear commanding word:
“Peace!” and there will be peace.

O Hearts in your anguish, remember this,
That the same Christ waits who will
Arise at your call, and bid the wild
Storms in your life, “Be still.”

Many people thought: “When the Messiah comes there will be no more misery.”
The truth of the matter is: “Where there is misery, there is the Messiah.”

Jesus told his disciples right before his crucifixion to expect trouble, but not to worry because He had overcome the world. So in this troubled and difficult environment:

II. Assurance is Needed.

Key Text: “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”
([Matthew 14:28](#))

A. So we can trust.

Jesus seeing their fear said: “It is I (literally I am - God’s name.) Don’t be afraid.” It is difficult for most of us to think of someone else who is total control. We know we aren’t.

It also seems to me that trust is about love. The Bible says that perfect (maybe mature) love casts out all fear. What a great scripture. So if we are afraid or lack trust maybe it boils down to a lack of love. The kind of love God has for us is sacrificial and always with our best interest at heart. I hope you believe that!

Knowing this puts us in a position:

B. So we can act.

As God's people we must move beyond recognition and even confession to act on our faith. Even though Jesus does not give Peter high marks for his faith, Peter tries. I think really that is all God expects. It is through action commanded by Jesus that we come to a fuller realization of his ability to save us. Listen to the transition that takes place in our text:

Jesus says: It is I

The disciples say: If it really is ...

Then they say: you really are, and they fall down and worship Jesus. A careful reading tells us the disciples are initially afraid of Jesus not the storm. They saw Jesus and they were terrified. (v.26) The church has lost a sense of reverence for God. Christ is somehow missing in many of our assemblies. Christ has called us all to be in His service, in ministry for Him. That takes trust, and it takes action. God has always chosen to work through men and women who were flawed to bring His plan of salvation to the world.

To know that God is always there with us makes all the difference.

Psalms 139:7-10, 23-24 (NIV) ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

III. Worship Results from Being Saved.

Key Text: "Then those who were in the boat worshipped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:33)

This passage is one of the so-called epiphany passages in Matthew (where Jesus shows who he really is):

- 1. Mount of Transfiguration**
- 2. After the Resurrection**
- 3. And here on Lake Galilee - He demonstrates He is God!**

Jesus appears to them on the lake and He saves Peter:

A. From Death

This is not the only time we see people saved from the sea. These are experiences of Noah, Moses, Jonah, and the apostle Paul. In fact the Apostle Paul relates how it was that the Israelite “forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” (I Corinthians 10:1b-4)

Unless God intervenes, we are lost. Unless Jesus saves us we have no hope. When He does, how can we help but worship and fall to our knees in adoration and love Him?

And as much as we can appreciate what God has done for us, that must free us:

B. For ministry

Freeing us for ministry means that sometimes we may be inconvenienced, and sometimes we may suffer. Jesus does not protect us from difficulty. If you read the story carefully, it is Jesus who sends his disciples out into the storm (made the disciples go out on the lake – v. 22) And when He first appears to the disciples the storm does not quit.

I wonder how many times we have blamed the devil for adversity in our lives when it was really just a life experience that Jesus wanted to use to grow us in the faith. Sometimes just like Peter, Jesus invites us out where it is rough and where it requires faith.

Conclusion: Jesus’ ministry has been given to the church.

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV) ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus is still with us yet not visible in the traditional sense. I do see Him sometimes in the Sunday School classes where dedicated teachers are sharing God, or in the song service someone will catch the real meaning of a song like “He is Able.” Sometimes the sermon will touch or meet a need that I never intended, and it is at that moment that God becomes visible. Jesus’ ministry, it seems to me, was about demonstrating who God was through Word, faith, and grace.

Jesus’ ministry always seems to center around eating together. Some faith traditions even say that it is through the Lord’s Supper that we receive grace.

There was a story that ran in the Boston Globe in June of 1990 about a most unusual wedding banquet. (*What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, pp. 48-49, Philip Yancey)

“Accompanied by her fiancé, a woman went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston and ordered the meal. The two of them pored over the menu, made selections of china and silver, and pointed to pictures of the flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive taste, and the bill came to thirteen thousand dollars. After leaving a check for half that amount as a down payment, the couple went home to flip through books of wedding announcements.

The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the potential groom got cold feet. “I’m just not sure,” he said. “It’s a big commitment. Let’s think about this a little longer.”

When his angry fiancé returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, the Events Manager could not have been more understanding. “The same thing happened to me, Honey,” she said, and told the story of her own broken engagement. But about the refund, she had bad news. “The contract is binding. You’re only entitled to thirteen hundred dollars back. You have two options: to forfeit the rest of the down payment or go ahead with the banquet. I’m sorry. Really I am.”

It seemed crazy, but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party – not a wedding banquet, mind you, but a big blowout. Ten years before, this same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She had got back on her feet, found a good job, and set aside a sizable nest egg. Now she had the wild notion of using her savings to treat the down-and-outs of Boston to a night on the town.

And so it was that in June of 1990 the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The hostess changed the menu to boneless chicken – “in honor of the groom,” she said – and sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. That warm summer night, people who were used to peeling half-gnawed pizza off the cardboard dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d’oeuvres to senior citizens propped up by crutches and aluminum walkers. Bag ladies, vagrants, and addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead sipped champagne, ate chocolate wedding cake, and danced to big-band melodies late into the night.

Whatever *we* receive from God is by sheer grace. We have no right to sit at the King’s table, but He says come! It is I; don’t be afraid!