**The divine Christ comes to the rescue**

Text: Mark 6:45-52

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**Scriptures:** Exodus 33:14-23; Mark 6:45-52

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] ‘Behold our God’, 51b, 107, 467, 531+532

**Series:** The gospel of Mark (#18)

**Theme:** Jesus reveals Himself to his disciples as the Divine Lord with power over the chaotic sea, but they do not understand who He is because of their unbelief.

**Proposition:** Believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God and know that He comes to the aid of all his disciples in their need so that there is no reason to be afraid.

**Introduction**

We are blessed as a church with those who come to worship here with us at first as people who are unknown to us. They are strangers. Old Testament Israel was commanded by the Lord to love ‘*the stranger who sojourns with you as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*’ (Lev 19:34). The writer to the Hebrews reveals this same truth in these words “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it*” (Hebrews 13:2).

A ‘stranger’ is a person whose identity is unknown to us. As we talk with a ‘stranger’ when they come to visit here with us, we desire to gently and wisely get to know them, not by way of intense interrogation! But by friendly conversation. We might carefully ask questions like: What is your name? Do you live in Christchurch? Have you come here recently from somewhere else? Do you know the Lord as yet or are you searching? When we understand the true identity of another person, they are no longer a stranger to us, and we are able to enter into a friendly relationship with them.

Mark wrote his short gospel to identify, beyond doubt, who Jesus is by presenting the facts about His life, death and resurrection so that He would no longer be a stranger. For example: At his baptism when a voice came from heaven, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*." (Mark 1:11); Jesus said to a paralysed man ‘*the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*’(Mark 2:10); Unclean spirits cried out “*You are the Son of God*” (Mark 3:11). We also see the identity of Jesus revealed after the events of our text from Mark 6:45-52, for example: Peter, on behalf of himself and the other disciples, declared “*You are the Christ*” (Mark 8:29); After Jesus died on the cross, a Roman centurion standing there said “*Truly this man was the Son of God*” (Mark 15:39).

Mark’s confirmation of the identity of Jesus as the God-man who came proclaim the gospel of God (Mark 1:14), would have been a strengthening encouragement to the Christians to whom Mark wrote. They were likely living in Rome and suffered precisely because they believed Jesus to be who He is: the sinless divine man who is God’s only begotten Son.

For people like you and me today, being able to answer for ourselves, with confidence, the question “who is Jesus?” strengthens our faith and enables us to live in a hostile, troubled world without fear as we trust in the Lord. Also being able to correctly identify Jesus for others is one of the ways that we can proclaim the gospel of God to those around us. We are going to look now at Mark 6:45-52 under three headings:

1. Jesus comes to his disciples in need
2. Jesus walks on the dark stormy sea
3. Jesus reveals Himself with God’s name
4. **Jesus comes to the rescue**

Crowds come together when there is an event which attracts many people, for example an international rugby match, a concert by a well-known musician or singer, an engaging public speaker, or a street performer doing clever tricks which look like magic. As Jesus began His public ministry, healing the demon-possessed, lepers, and those with physical disabilities, he attracted a very large crowd (e.g. Mark 3:8) who followed him wherever he went. Earlier in his gospel, Mark records the time when Jesus left the crowd behind by getting into a boat on the Sea of Galilee and then, after being woken from his sleep, he calmed a fierce storm with the words “*Peace! Be Still!*” (Mark 4:39).

Some time later, Jesus sought to escape the crowds by going to a ‘desolate place’ with his disciples (Mark 6:31), but the people ran on ahead of them. There were 5,000 men in that crowd, presumably with many women and children also. It was then and there that Jesus performed a miracle by dividing up two fish and five loaves so that everyone was fed to their satisfaction and there were twelve baskets of leftovers (Mark 6:43). Mark’s gospel is the shortest of the four, he included only the details which he saw to be essential as the narrative of his account moves along. One of his most commonly used words (42 times) he employs to keep up the momentum in this rapidly moving gospel account is ‘immediately’, which you can see at the start of our text.

Mark notes that Jesus ‘dismissed the crowd’ (v45). The parallel account in John’s gospel tells us why: “*they were about to come and take him by force and make him king*” (John 6:15). They wrongly identified Jesus the ‘miracle worker’ as a powerful man who could be the warrior-Messiah they had long waited for and who would overthrow the Roman forces who occupied the land of Israel. Jesus is not a military conqueror of human armies who has come to free people from oppression in this world.

Mark records that Jesus sent his disciples in a boat out across the Sea of Galilee whilst He went up a mountain to pray alone. Later Jesus saw the disciples ‘*making headway painfully*’ (v48) against the wind. Gospel writer John, adding more detail than Mark, describes the condition of the water ‘*the sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing*’ (John 6:18). Matthew notes that the boat, a long way from land, was ‘*beaten by the waves*’ (Matt 14.24). The disciples were in a potentially perilous situation.

Here is the first amazing truth about Jesus that we see from this passage: He sees the predicament of the disciples during the fourth watch of the night – the three hours before dawn. In the dark or partial light His vision appears to be superhuman. He knows their trouble. He is aware of the crisis that they are in, and He acts for their best interests. He intervenes in a crisis situation to do what they cannot do. Notice that He does not stand on the shore of the troubled water shouting out directions to the disciples: row harder! pull to the left! Come on, you are almost there! Put your backs into it! No. Jesus comes to the disciples in who were out on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus goes out to the rescue of the disciples, and He does so by coming to be with them in the midst of their difficulty.

In His action, we see the very character of God displayed. God who took the initiative to rescue His people from the crisis of slavery in Egypt. God who was with His people in the midst of the wilderness, firstly represented by a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day (Exo 13:21), then within the tabernacle. God who is compassionate and gracious (Ps 86:15). The action of Jesus in coming to the rescue of a small group of men in a boat on a stormy lake, mirrors the very gospel of God that Jesus came to proclaim (Mark 1:14). Now the gospel itself is not a temporary rescue from a sudden storm, but a permanent deliverance from sin, death and darkness into holiness, life and light.

Why, you may ask, did Jesus wait so long to rescue his struggling disciples, wouldn’t it have been easier to have acted sooner – perhaps before the wind came up, or when they had not gone so far out? In His perfect timing we see that Jesus is not a mere miracle worker who acts to make the lives of those he touches easier, less troublesome and more comfortable. The work of Jesus the Saviour is to identify Himself to people like us so that we come to believe in and trust Him. The gospel is not about Jesus guaranteeing a materially healthy, wealthy and carefree life for all who follow Christ. His purpose is vitally more important than that. In the early hours of the morning that day on the Sea of Galilee He acted in such a way that His true identity was revealed. Which brings us to the second point:

1. **Jesus walks on the stormy sea**

The Sea of Galilee is a very unusual inland body of water. It is the lowest fresh water lake on earth, being about 200 m below sea level. It is about 21 km long and 13 km wide. To the north is Mt Hermon, at a height of almost 3,000m (2,814m). Cold air currents frequently descend rapidly from this high peak through the narrow hills to the north of the Sea of Galilee and meet the warmer air above this lake, causing sudden and violent winds.

Mark has already recorded one such storm earlier in his gospel (Mark 4:35-41). On the occasion of our text, the disciples were heading north, to the town of Bethsaida (v45) and this strong wind was against them. John records in Greek that they had rowed about 25-30 stadia when Jesus came out to them. A stadion is about 200 m so 25-30 stadia translates into 5-6 kms (or 3-4 miles). He came to the disciples ‘*walking on the sea*’ (v48).

Now Mark, who only includes essential details in his gospel, repeats the fact that Jesus was ‘*walking on the sea*’ (v49) in the next verse. This emphasizes the fact that what Jesus was doing was utterly remarkable. This was a supernatural miracle. No one has ever walked on water without the aid of floatation devices before or since. The basic reason why nobody apart from Jesus has ever walked on water is that when you are upright and your feet are at the surface, there is no buoyancy force to keep you up. Gravity will pull you well down into the water every time. You will be partly or fully submerged. You can try this at a pool, lake or beach with you providing you are a competent swimmer, there are lifeguards nearby, or the water depth is shallow.

The disciples understood very well that it is utterly impossible for a person to walk on water. That is why they thought that Jesus was a ghost when they saw Him (v49). Just imagine that you’re struggling to row against the wind in a stormy sea with your boat being beaten by waves. Then, in the midst of this you spot what looks like a person walking towards you on the water. Your brain reasons, ‘*that can’t be a real person because nobody can walk on water; therefore it must be an apparition, a phantom, or a spooky spirit*’. Who wouldn’t be scared in that situation? The disciples, some of whom were experienced fishermen who knew this lake well, were terrified. This is completely understandable. It makes sense.

But now Mark records a detail which looks really strange. He writes that Jesus “*meant to pass by them*” (v48). This doesn’t mean that Jesus intended to carry onto Bethsaida on foot and to leave the disciples in trouble, only to change his mind at the last minute and then to join them in the boat as an afterthought. The language Mark carefully uses here is highly significant because it mirrors the phrase used of God in the Old Testament when He reveals Himself firstly to Moses and then to Elijah: when Moses was put in the cleft of the rock, the glory of the Lord passed by (Ex 33:19-23); when Elijah was lodged in a cave, the Lord passed by (1 Kings 19:11). So we could accurately paraphrase ‘He meant to pass by them’ as ‘He intended to reveal Himself to them’. Jesus was not going to leave the disciples in their struggle, He had come, not only to rescue them but to show them His true identity!

The truth is that Only God, and God alone, can walk on water. He tramples on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8). His path is in the mighty waters (Isaiah 43:16). His way was through the sea (Psalm 77:19). He delivered Noah and his family from the great sea which covered the earth (Gen 8:16). He delivered the Israelites through the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-22). As you may well know, in Scripture, the sea is often a symbol of chaos (e.g. Gen 1:2), evil (e.g. Isa 57:20) and danger (e.g. Isa 51:10). Remember that the Beast in the book of Revelation emerges from the sea (Rev 13:1) and that there will be no sea in the new earth (Rev 21:1).

The identity which Christ had shown to His disciples was that He is God. He revealed His complete power over the troubled waters of the sea as He came to rescue His disciples. He showed His power over chaos, evil and danger. Christ also reveals His name as He speaks to his terrified disciples, which brings us to the third point:

1. **Jesus identifies Himself with God’s name**

Mark rapidly moves the account of Jesus joining His disciples on the troubled sea forward by using one of his favourite words again; “immediately”: ‘*But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased’. (v50b-51b).* When Jesus identifies Himself – confirming that the disciples had not seen a ghost, but the very same person who had called each one of them to follow Him. These twelve disciples knew Him. They had shared history together. He had walked through the grainfields with them on a Sabbath (Mark 2:23-27). He had healed a tortured man on the eastern shore of this lake, and he sent the legion of demons who had possessed this outcast into a herd of pigs who drowned in the water (Mark 5). He had sent the twelve disciples out in pairs to drive out demons and to heal many people (Mark 6:6-13).

However, Jesus does more than identify Himself as the human Jesus they already knew. He uses the highly significant words “It is I”. In the original Greek language, in which Mark wrote this gospel, these words are literally “I am”. This is God’s name as He revealed Himself to Moses, saying: *“I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* Jesus identifies Himself with God’s name. Names in the Bible have meaning. The meaning of God’s name ‘I AM’ is that He exists. He is real. He exists independently of everything that He has made. There was never a time when God was not, nor will there ever be a time when God will cease to be.

The name ‘I AM’ and God’s covenant name ‘YHWH’ derive from the same Hebrew root. ‘YHWH’ is sometimes translated by the English word ‘Jehovah’ (e.g. KJV Exo 6:3), but more often by the word LORD in capital letters. YHWH, the LORD, is the covenant God of Israel. He is the Great “I AM” who sent Moses to rescue His people from their struggle as oppressed slaves in Egypt. The disciples know this God from the Old Testament history of their own people. Those twelve men in that boat out in the Sea of Galilee were Jews: genetic descendants of Abraham. Jesus is identifying Himself to them as being the God who delivers His covenant people.

The disciples had already seen the complete command of Jesus over the troubled sea, firstly when He had commanded Creation “*Peace, be still!*” (Mark 4:39). Now they had just witnessed Jesus doing what no mere man could ever do alone; He had walked on water. He completely controls the force of gravity, together with all other forces in Creation. Mark uses two different words in sequence which both mean ‘amazed’ to convey how absolutely incredibly surprised and in wonder the disciples were, writing: *“And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened”* (v51b-52).

They were amazed with amazement, but they still did not identify who Jesus is. It wasn’t that they lacked the necessary information. Their problem was that they did not believe. This was a matter of a hardened heart, not head without knowledge. It was a question of faith, not a lack of evidence. They had seen Jesus miraculously feed 5,000 men in a ‘*desolate place*’ (Mark 6:32), literally a desert or wilderness. However, they had not understood that this pointed to Jesus being the God who fed His Old Testament people with manna from heaven as He delivered them. Instead of being full of confidence that Jesus, the divine man, was now with them in the boat, instead of being filled with joy that because of His presence they were safe and secure, the disciples were utterly astounded because they had not yet identified Him correctly, their hearts were hardened in unbelief.

Theirs was a moral difficulty, not an intellectual one. They had sufficient facts upon which to confidently believe that Jesus is God, but for a person to do so is to acknowledge God’s right to be obeyed in everything. To believe in Jesus is to hand over the control of your own life. This is why so many people do not believe, even when they have been shown the facts which point to the certain conclusion that Jesus is indeed God.

Now let’s go back to the boat in the lake. Jesus is no ghost, He is real that is why He said to the disciples “*Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid*” (v50). Later, many of these disciples would come to know and believe in the Jesus. For most their hearts did not remain hardened. Once they came to faith, they had the courage to go out into hostile environments to spread the good news of the gospel far and wide, many dying as martyrs as they fearlessly served their Lord, knowing that He was with them ‘*always, to the end of the age*’ (Matt 28:20).

So what does all this mean for us today?

* Firstly, know that God has taken the initiative to come to the rescue of people like you and me who are in peril, not on the stormy sea, but in a world of chaos, evil and sin.
* Secondly, know that God has sent His beloved Son Jesus, to save people like you and me, not from drowning, but from eternal spiritual death.
* Thirdly, know that Jesus Christ is both God and man. He has the power and authority to walk on water. He has the power and authority to willingly lay down His own life unto death on a cross and by so doing pay the debt of sin of every single person who believes in Him.
* Fourthly, know that you have all the information you need to correctly identify the who Jesus really is: the divine Son of God.

This passage in Mark where Jesus goes out to rescue his disciples, walks on water, and reveals Himself to be God gives you all the evidence that you need to recognise Jesus for who He really is. If you do not believe Him to be Jesus, a name which means ‘God rescues’ or ‘God saves’ then it is not because you lack the necessary knowledge, it is because you, like the disciples that day on the lake, have a heart which is hardened. This hardening occurs when people like you and me do not want to accept the reality that Jesus is both Saviour, Lord and Judge, despite the evidence.

To accept this truth is to submit to Him, to acknowledge your need of Him, and to trust Him with your life. If you believe in Christ and hand over control of your own life to Him, He will not let you down but will rescue you, provide for you and protect you. See Jesus for who HE IS and come to Him in faith – trusting that He can rescue you. He will deliver you from sin and death and He will never ever leave you. When Jesus is with you, there is no reason to be afraid. His perfect love for all those He rescues, drives out fear (1 John 4:18). This is why you and I can have courage to live in a troubled world. Take heart, He has overcome this world (John 16:33). He is the Jesus, the Saviour, the God who rescues people in peril. People just like you and me. Today, through His living Word, Jesus has clearly identified Himself to you.

AMEN