Mark Lesson 20 (2022)

**“IT IS I”**

Mark 6:45-56

Key Verse: 6:50b

“Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’”

 Jesus performed many miracles during his ministry on earth, healing the sick and driving out demons. The highlight of his ministry was the miraculous feeding of the five thousand people with five loaves and two fish in last week’s passage. It revealed that he was not a political messiah but a spiritual one, full of compassion and mercy. In today’s passage, Mark added the unique event in which Jesus’ walked on water. Of course, Jesus didn’t always walk on water. But this event raises our eyebrows. It makes us wonder, *“Who is he that he could walk on water?”* When his disciples saw him walking on water, they were terrified, thinking he was a ghost. It also challenges us to think of who Jesus really was. *“Was he a ghost, man, or God?*” Jesus identified himself by saying to them, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” The description of Jesus’ healing ministry in the last part of today’s passage (53-56) highlights the characteristic of his messianic ministry. This morning, let’s think about what Jesus said about himself when he said, “It is I,” and what it means to us.

 Look at verse 45. “Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.” The adverb “Immediately” relates us to the previous event, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand with small resources. Nearly 10,000 people, including men, women, and children, ate to their full (42). People must have been amazed at the power of Jesus. Considering their extreme poverty, what Jesus was able to do for them raised their expectation of Jesus even higher. According to John’s account, after experiencing this miracle, people began to say, “Surely this is **the Prophet** who is to come into the world.” They even intended to make him king by force. (Jn. 6:15) “Making him king by force” indicates the potential riot against the current political system, including the Roman Empire.

It was a dangerous moment. It was possible that his disciples also thought that Jesus should be their new king. Knowing their urgent political intent, Jesus didn’t want his disciples to join the crowd. He immediately separated them from the crowd by forcing them to get into the boat and sent them ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he himself dismissed the crowd. I am sure his disciples were reluctant to leave the crowd, and the crowd didn’t want to leave. Even when they were leaving, they shouted, ***“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!”***

Look at verse 46. “After leaving them, he went up on the mountainside to pray.” The field where Jesus fed the five thousand seemed near the mountains. Jesus, after dismissing the crowd, went up on the mountain to pray. His action indicates that he was deeply conscious of what was ahead of him at this time of his ministry. He was in deep agony. But who could have understood his agony and the cruel reality he was about to face? Nobody, not even his disciples. They were just too immature to understand what Jesus was going through. Jesus needed time to make an important decision for himself and the future of his ministry. He also needed communion with God the Father for the strength and courage to face the consequences of his decision, which included terrible suffering and even death on the cross. It reminds us of his prayer at Gethsemane, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (14:36) We often notice that the core of Jesus’ prayers was always to obey God’s will, never to follow his own. I am sure that through his prayer, Jesus could renew his decision and find the courage to follow God’s will.

Look at verse 47. “Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples were straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. “It seems Jesus spent quite a long time in the mountains while the disciples struggled to row the boat. The disciples’ struggle in the lake got more intense because the wind blew against them. No matter how hard they struggled to row the boat, it didn’t move toward their destination. Struggling the whole night, the disciples could have been exhausted. They might have felt that Jesus had forgotten about them. But that wasn’t true. Verse 47 says, “Jesus saw the disciples were straining at the oars.” Jesus did not forget them. He knew exactly what they were going through and came to help them in time. We should remember this big picture when we are strained in adverse situations. Sometimes, our life gets more challenging when the wind blows against us. Some people suddenly lose their job and get sick. Some of us may feel that everything seems to go against us despite our great effort. We panic, become frustrated and are exhausted. It’s tough to go through the tunnel. We become discouraged, thinking that Jesus has forgotten us.

However, we should remember that we are not left alone. God knows what we go through. Even though his help may not come immediately, we must believe that it will arrive at the best time in the best way. It reminds us of what Apostle Paul said to Christians in Corinth, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” (1 Cor. 10:13) Therefore, we should remain calm in any adverse situation, believing God never forgets about us, just as Psalm 46:10 states, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

However, Jesus wanted to give his disciples an important spiritual lesson. Look at verse 48. “Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them.”

Shortly before dawn, probably around 4-5 am, Jesus went out to see and help his disciples, walking on the lake (Pic#1). Jesus didn’t have to walk on the lake to get to his disciples. Why did he come to them, walking on the lake?

It was to reveal himself as God, more than a man or even a great prophet. In his messianic ministry, Jesus identified himself only as the Son of Man, focusing on his human side. Now, he wanted to show a different side of his identity as God, the Son of God, by walking on water, which is absolutely impossible for any human to do. At first, he walked toward his disciples; then, he changed his course as if he was passing by so they could see him walking on the lake.

Look at verses 49-50a. “But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.” It seems that it was not so difficult for his disciples to recognize Jesus’ walking toward them. All of them saw him walking on the lake. (Pic#2) Jesus wanted to make sure they saw him walking on the lake. Yet, when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. (Pic#2b)

It was not the only time that they thought he was a ghost. After Jesus’ death on the cross, his disciples locked themselves in the room. But then, when the Risen Jesus appeared to them, passing through the locked door and walls, they thought he was a ghost (Lk. 24:37). *“How could he pass through the wall unless he was a ghost?”*

Indeed, Jesus’ passing through the wall and walking on water was supernatural. Occasionally, I enjoy watching magic at the AGT (America’s Got Talent). Some of their magic performances are mesmerizing (Pic#3). It fools people, even the judges. Magic is manipulating supernatural power skillfully and masterfully. But Jesus’ walking on water was not manipulation. It revealed that he is God in man. Jesus could walk on water because he is God, the divine. The disciples, however, could have never imagined that Jesus could walk on water. So, they thought they saw a ghost, not Jesus.

Look at verse 50b. “Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’” The phrases “Take courage” and “Don’t be afraid” mean the same. He told them they didn’t need to be afraid because he was always with them, even when they thought they were alone.

Jesus also used the phrase **“It is I,”** which is **“I Am,”** which is his self-identification as God, a reminder of God’s self-identification to the people of Israel in the book of Exodus. When God told Moses that he should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt, he asked God*, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them God sent me, and they ask, “What is his name? Then what shall I tell them?”* God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.” (Ex. 3:14) In the Gospel of John, Jesus used the term **“I AM”** seven times to identify himself as God.

Jesus had always identified himself as the Son of Man. He didn’t use the term “The Son of God” or “the Messiah” for himself. But now Jesus called himself **“I AM”** to teach his disciples his origin as God. What Jesus revealed about himself here is far beyond our understanding. He is God above all, above all nature, power, and all created things. He is unchangeable and indestructible. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is an infinite and eternal God. So, when Jesus said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid!” he meant that they didn’t need to be afraid in any circumstance because he who is Almighty God cares for them and is always with them.

 Look at verses 51 and 52. “Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.” We are unsure if the wind died down, whether it was because Jesus climbed into the boat or because of a coincidence. It does not matter. But what matters is that we are truly safe and secure when we trust him personally in all circumstances. To believe in Jesus means to let Jesus live within us in person and have a personal connection to him. The disciples were slow to learn about who Jesus was even after experiencing his miraculous feeding of nearly 10,000 people by multiplying the five loaves and two fish. Mark said their lack of understanding was due to the hardness of their hearts. “The hardness of their hearts”

 We see people whose hearts are hardened for various reasons. The Scripture often warns against the hardness of our hearts. We may think that only unbelievers would harden their hearts. So, it’s a little surprising to hear that his disciples had the problem of the hardness of their hearts. It means that the hardness of the heart is a common problem of all fallen humankind, including Christians. Through the Parable of the Soil, we learn that God’s kingdom can grow when we have good heart-soil (4:1-20).

In other words, we must cultivate our hearts and souls. What does it mean to nurture our hearts and souls? It means taking care of our whole person, including our body, emotions, cognition, and behaviors. If we don’t take care of them properly, we don’t automatically become the persons God wants us to be. Instead, we become rigid and dysfunctional people. The outcome of our life may not be so great. We become unhealthy, unhappy, and unsatisfied. That’s why Paul said that we rip from what we saw. Therefore, before it’s too late, we should take care of our souls by developing healthy bodies, emotions, cognitions, and behaviors.

 In verses 53-56, we see how all the sick people in the villages and towns in Galilee who came to or were brought to Jesus received healing. Look at verse 56. “And wherever he went – into villages, towns o countryside- they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.” Touching the edge of his cloak reminds us of the healing of the bleeding woman in Mark 5:24-34. The news about her recovery probably spread throughout all villages and towns in Galilee. So, these people were eager to touch even the edge of Jesus’ cloak. But it was not their touch that brought healing. It was the will and power of Jesus, the Messiah God for all fallen humankind.

There are many hurting people in the world, both physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Emotional wounds and psychological injuries take a long time to heal. The phrase “All who touched it were healed” shows that healing comes from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “God the I AM.” Jesus is the healer of our souls from wounds and pains.

Let me close the sermon. Life is not easy for anyone in this troubled world. Sometimes, the wind seems to blow against us. Without faith, we can easily fall. But we can rise again and again when we put our trust in him. No matter what life stage we may be in, we must not be afraid but trust in him. Jesus said to his disciples, “Take courage. It is I. Don’t be afraid.” We must remember that God is always with us and learn to trust in him in whatever situation we may be in. Faith is trusting in God in good times, especially in challenging times.

Despite all the blessings that Jesus promises, it’s up to our choice to trust or not trust in him. Through over 40 years of my life of faith in Jesus, I confess that the best choice I can make is to trust in him in all circumstances. Be still and acknowledge that God is in control. God not only gave us emotions and reason, but he also gave us faith. But we need to take care of them properly. May we cultivate and nurture our bodies, emotions, reason, and faith to grow healthy, strong, and mature. God is trustworthy. “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”