

11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 4, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 6:45-52

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are two very common responses I get when I ask someone how they are doing. The most common is something along the lines of “fine.” I guess that means that they are about the same as usual. Nothing new to report. No big problems to share or successes to celebrate. The second very common answer I receive is “tired.” We are a very tired people. When we are tired, we might not be thinking well. We might not come to the correct conclusions. We might become scared. We might be just like the disciples in the boat in Mark 6:45-52. Jesus comes to them and comforts them with his word and his presence. He continues to do the same for us when we are tired and scared.

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he himself dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶After he had sent them off, he went up the mountain to pray.

⁴⁷When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and Jesus was alone on the land. ⁴⁸He saw them straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he went to them, walking on the sea. He was ready to pass by them. ⁴⁹When they saw him walking on the sea, they thought he was a ghost, and they cried out. ⁵⁰They all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke with them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹Then he climbed up into the boat with them, and the wind stopped. They were completely amazed, ⁵²because they had not understood about the loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

Jesus had just multiplied the five loaves and two fish in order to feed more than 5,000 people with twelve baskets of food left over. The people wanted to make Jesus into their king so they would be fed every day like this. Instead, Jesus sends the disciples away by boat and he goes by himself to pray. It has been a long day of teaching, ending with a wonderful miracle. Everyone would have been tired. But the disciples were not getting any rest yet.

They were miles from shore and the wind was against them. They had been struggling to get across the lake for most of the night. Remember, that many of the disciples were fishermen. They were seasoned sailors on the Sea of Galilee. But they were not making much progress that night. They were struggling all night after a long day with the people. And where was Jesus?

It is a question we might have when we are tired. Where is Jesus? It is a question we might have when we are struggling. Where is Jesus? I’m tired from many long days or nights of work. I’m exhausted from taking care of the kids and doing the housework. I’m worn out after taking care of aging parents after dealing with somewhat lazy coworkers and demanding bosses. I’m straining at the oars, doing all I can in life and nothing seems to change. I’m not making any progress. I don’t see a time of rest in the near future. All I see is that I’m doing everything and where is Jesus?

And then there is my spiritual life. I’m trying so hard to live as the child of God I am, but I’m straining at the oars against the strong wind of counter Christian culture at school or work or among my friends. Am I the only one at the office who believes the Bible is all true, that Jesus is the Son of God who rose from the dead? Is the only time you see other Lutherans when you go to church? We can get so tired that we start making bad decisions. We start going along with culture since it is so tiring to fight against it. We might give up just a few unimportant biblical teachings to fit in with people around us. Life is just easier if we don’t constantly have to strain at the oars

against unbiblical ideas and values. After all, Jesus doesn't want my life to be a struggle. And if he allows me to struggle all alone, then what good is Jesus for me anyway? He is taking it easy in heaven on his majestic throne while we do all the hard work.

When we think about it, we know it is not true that Jesus has left us alone. But when we are tired, we are not thinking clearly. We are an easier target of the devil's lies. We don't see clearly when we are exhausted physically, mentally and spiritually. But Jesus sees us.

⁴⁸He saw them straining at the oars...

This is such a comforting line. When they were straining at the oars, Jesus saw them. He was miles away, but he saw what they were going through. They could not see him with their eyes and did not trust that he saw them, but Jesus saw them. When you are exhausted from struggling with something in your life, Jesus sees you. Your struggle may be known by many in your life or by few or maybe your struggle is something you are keeping all to yourself. But Jesus knows and Jesus sees and Jesus cares. You are not alone. You are never alone.

The Son of God who miraculously multiplied the bread and the fish would not allow a lake to separate him from his disciples who needed him. Jesus simply walked on the water to catch up to their boat. We have even more reason to believe that nothing can keep Jesus from coming to us to help us. For the Savior who died, rose from the dead on the third day. Death could not keep him from his people. He rules from his majestic throne in heaven but he is not confined to that one place. He comes to us in his Word today just as he did to the terrified disciples in the boat.

"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."

The Word of God from the lips of the Son of God who was walking on water was powerful to calm the disciples' fears. The Word of God recorded in the Scriptures by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is powerful to calm our fears today too. Believe what Jesus continues to say to you. *"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."* He has not left you alone. He is with you.

In addition, Christ comes to us with his very body and blood in Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper is not merely a symbol that Jesus is with us. Holy Communion is not an object lesson to teach us that Jesus is with us. Jesus is really with us. Jesus is really present. Receive his body and blood along with the bread and wine with believing hearts as Jesus comes to you in Communion to forgive every sin and to be with you through every struggle in life. He says to you, *"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."*

The next verses are an interesting twist from what we might expect. We might expect the disciples to be great from now on. They have experienced so many miracles. They have received so many words of comfort from Jesus. Surely they get it now. Surely their faith is strong now. But...

Then he climbed up into the boat with them, and the wind stopped. They were completely amazed, ⁵²because they had not understood about the loaves. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

These disciples were believers. They trusted that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God and their Savior. But they didn't trust or understand everything Jesus told them yet. Their hearts still didn't get it all.

Our hearts don't always get it either. It takes a while for us to trust that Jesus is always with us. In fact, until we get to heaven, we will always need someone to help us in this area. Therefore, we need the Scriptures. We need Communion. We need the promises given in our Baptism. And we need other believers to tell us about Jesus when we are tired and struggling. I have been blessed to serve with you, my brothers and sisters in the faith, at both congregations. Being in worship and Bible class with you, as well as your private words of encouragement have been a

great blessing to me. Continue to be that blessing to others in your life. Let them know that Jesus is with them.

Tell them the story of Jesus walking on the water to comfort his tired and scared disciples. Tell them about the time Elisha's servant thought they were all alone and God opened his eyes to see the horses and chariots of fire protecting them. Tell them about the apostle Paul who was all alone in prison, expecting any day to be executed. Yet, Paul was convinced that he was not alone for he proclaimed, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

The Lord Jesus will bring all believers safely to his heavenly kingdom one day. Until then, he promises to be with us always, even and especially when we are tired.

Amen.