

If you were with us last week, you may recall that I spoke of Jesus breaking down barriers to enable radical inclusion. I also spoke of the disciples feeling compelled to follow Jesus, but entirely unsure of who he is. Well these three themes: breaking down barriers, radical inclusion and gradual revelation of who is Jesus continue in our reading from Mark today. Our reading is in part also the story of Jesus 3rd crossing of the Sea of Galilee. Which again raises the metaphor of the sea as a place of chaos and disorder as well as a division between Jewish and Gentile territory.

Before I go on with speaking of the reading, let me review the context in which it appears in Mark's Gospel. One of the problems of meeting once a week is that we skip forward some distance in the lectionary without encountering the chapters that might have established context for our reading. Since last week's reading late in chapter 4, when Jesus sleeping in the boat in stormy seas was awakened by the fear stricken disciples; he immediately rebuked the wind and told the sea, *Peace! Be still!* and order was restored. In Chapter 5, Jesus heals the Gerasene Demoniac by transferring the demons into a herd of swine – a clear sign that he was in Gentile territory. Returning to Jewish territory in his 2nd crossing of the sea, Jesus restored a girl to life and cured a woman who had hitherto incurable haemorrhages. He then returns in chapter 6 to Nazareth the place of his childhood where he is rejected and he replies to the rejection with *Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.* Chapter 6 continues with an account of the mission of the twelve followed by an account of the death of John the Baptist at the command of Herod at the behest of Salome – a passage of great importance in that it relates the confusion of who Jesus is – a risen John or Elijah returned. That confusion will be significantly resolved in our reading next week on the feast of the Transfiguration. Our reading this evening is immediately preceded by the account of the feeding of the 5 thousand. After our reading, Jesus is once again in struggles over rule breaking with the Pharisees immediately followed by Jesus healing a Gentile woman in Tyre followed by a journey to the Decapolis – the 10 cities in Gentile territory on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. It is in the Decapolis that Jesus miraculously feeds the 4000. I trust you see that the themes of breaking down barriers, radical inclusion, and a growing sense of who Jesus is really is sustained throughout chapters 4 through 7.

So to our reading this evening: perhaps the most important sentence is *He intended to pass them by.* Pass them by is the English translation of a Greek Word *parerchomai* which means powerful self-revelation. The Greek fluent, 1st century Christians reading Mark would have recognized *parerchomai* as the word God used in his revelation of himself to Moses in Exodus 33 *I will make all my goodness pass before you....* By walking on water, Jesus is revealing who he is to the disciples, but the disciples are not yet ready, they have not yet

learned enough to avoid confusing Jesus with a ghost. Once again, Jesus witnessing their terror, in his compassion, calms the storm – another major act of self-revelation. Before we get too sniffy about the obtuseness of the disciples, ask yourselves how well do I understand who Jesus is? How much has my understanding changed as life has happened to me? How much do I sense I have yet to learn, leave alone understand? Will I ever truly, fully understand, perhaps at the moment I breathe my last?

Our reading concludes with the healing of the sick in Gennesaret back in Jewish territory. These 4 verses are a commentary of what real faith can be: *they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.*

Please note the contrast between, on the one side, the disciples' terror at the appearance of a "ghost" and the confusion when he stilled the waters *And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened* and, on the other side, faith that only touching the hem of his garment could bring healing. Isn't that contrast the story of our lives, overcome by doubt, oppressed by all the details of demanding lives, and occasional gifts of revelation that still our worries and calm our souls? But how often have we failed to recognize those gifts of revelation because of the barrier of a heart that is hardened – hardened by self-doubt, exhaustion, drive for worldly riches, fear, bravado – all closing off our recognition of the promise of healing.

These few chapters of Mark do not promise that life will be easy. They do promise that the risen Christ will be with us to still storms and offer healing. But the promise, more often than not, may go unrecognized. How can we remain open to the promise? Simply by breaking down barriers to others and within ourselves. Who knows from what or from whom God may speak to us? Breaking down those barriers will lead us to radical inclusion. The more we are able to radically include, the more we will see Jesus and the more we will be healed. Let us be clear, healing often doesn't mean a cure. It does mean acceptance and reconciliation and trust in God. Dropping the barriers and opening to creation, simple to say, not at all simple to do. Hard, continuous work and self-examination in an open community are essential. We must never discount how much we can learn from the faith journey of others even, and perhaps especially, those who challenge our comfort zone.

Thanks be to God, Amen