

Theophany in the Dark, Stormy Sea

Աստուածայայտնութիւն Մութ, Ալեկոծ Ծովուն Մէջ

Mark 6:45-56

I am not sure if you remember in 2012 an Italian cruise ship sank. The Italian cruise ship **Costa Concordia** had a terrible accident. The captain **Francesco Schettino**, 52, apparently tried to show off the gleaming **\$563 million vessel** to residents of this island off the coast of **Tuscany**, and in the process ripped a hole in its hull. To make it worse, he was one the first ones who abandon the ship, saying he accidentally fall off the ship on a rescue boat! ¹

-Why do I start with this illustration? We are back to the sea, we are back to the sailing boat, and we are facing a storm.

-Why did Jesus send his disciples alone to the sea, after the wonderful event of the feeding of the 5000?

If you recall, the disciples came back from the mission field, exhausted and tired. Jesus led them to rest in a **remote area (desolate area)**. But the crowd was chasing them. Jesus **had compassion** on **“the sheep without a shepherd”**, and at the end of the day there was a **messianic feast banquet** that fed the 5000 both spiritually and physically.

Now Mark writes:

Immediately he made (compelled, insisted) his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.
(Mark 6:45 ESV).

Robert Gundry makes the point that the verb used here for made, compelled, is so strong it implies that he did it against their will. ²

What is going on?

Also, did Jesus want to be alone with the crowd while dismissing them?

John’s Gospel added that the crowd wanted to declare Jesus as king. Jesus did not want this to be declared yet. He did not want his disciples to join the crowd?

Maybe....

Mark does not give the reason. It’s possible that Jesus is teaching them a new lesson from the field. Jesus sent them alone to the sea, where uncertainty was always waiting for them. **If you remember the Israelites did not like the sea**. They thought there was evil in the sea. The disciples went to the sea, while Jesus went to the mountain to pray.

And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. (Mark 6:46 ESV)

I wonder what Jesus' prayer was about.

Most likely he thanked his Father for all the things that were happening:

healing,

teaching,

sending the disciples to the mission,

feeding the 5000.

Yet I think his heart was also aching by **the presence of evil** in the world:

- **Herod Antipas** and the political power of the day,

- the **Roman** presence and their hostility towards people,

- and most of all the **hardened hearts** of the Jewish **Rabbis and the Pharisees**. Paul

too prayed that the heart of Ephesians would be softened: **“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”** (Eph 1:18).

-I think Jesus also knew that the disciples did not understand what happened when he fed the 5000: **“for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”**(Mark 6:52)

⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, (Mark 6:47-48 ESV)

On the Sea of Galilee, usually at the end of winter the wind can blow suddenly, and it becomes impossible to row against the it.³ Please notice how Jesus watched what was going on. Although he was on the mountain praying but he never lost his sight over his disciples. **“He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.”** (Mark 6:48)

This picture inspires me. Our Lord Jesus Christ will not leave us alone. He sends us alone, but his presence will not leave us.

Jesus sent the disciples to the sea; he almost forced them to go alone.

I think he wanted to keep some distance.

Please notice the disciples were there alone almost all night.

They were on the boat the first watch of the night (6 - 9pm),

the second watch (9pm- 12 am)

the third watch (12 -to 3am)

and about the fourth watch of the night (3 - 6 am)
Jesus came to them, walking on the sea (Mark 6:48).
All night they were trying to move to the other side of the sea to **Bethsaida**. but they could not. They did not make any progress in their move.
They are learning that without Jesus nothing would “move”.

In the previous storm incident (Mark 4:35-41), Jesus was on the boat sleeping. I see again that Jesus kept some distance. I believe he was teaching them and us, that he cares for us, and he is with us **even in the dark storm** all over and around us. Jesus does not interfere soon, so that we make a necessary self-discovery about our lives.

I don't like the dark, stormy sea, and I don't think you do.

Now Mark writes an interesting statement:

“...**He meant to pass by them,**” (Mark 6:48 ESV) (He was about to pass by them NIV)

The word that is used originates from the Old Testament. Robert Gundry observes that this verb “**passing by**” **παρέρχομαι** (*parerchomai*) indicates a parade of divinity such as characterized Old Testament **theophanies (divine appearances)**⁴ The verb *parerchomai* “to pass by”, when connected to a divinity, refers to epiphany.⁵

What is Theophany? “This word comes from the Greek words *theos*, which means “God”, and *phano*, which means “to manifest, show, demonstrate, or display.”⁶

Theophany is the manifestation of God in some visible way.

Moses had an experience with God. It is theophany:

“And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while **my glory passes by** I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until **I have passed by**. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”(Exodus 33:21-23 ESV)

Here is **Elijah's** encounter with God:

“And he said, ‘Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, ... not in the wind...not in the earthquake... not in the fire...(but) in the sound of a low whisper.(I King 19:11-12)

In the Old Testament we find how God alone can walk on a sea:

“who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.”(Job 9:8)

“Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.” (Psalm 77:19)

Jesus is the new epiphany of Yahweh.

Last Sunday we noticed that when Jesus fed the crowd. The God of the manna comes again to us to break the bread and give it to the crowd.

Let us not get confused about how Jesus could feed 5000 or could walk on the water. Both events cannot be explained. I believe God can do miracles, and I cannot explain them scientifically.

Yet, the deeper meaning of the miracles is the **miracle of Theophany**: “Jesus Christ appears in my dark, stormy night, to calm me down.”

Jesus Christ appeared and fed my hunger..., my spiritual and physical hunger...

What happened next?

Comfort....

but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ **for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”** (Mark 6:49-50 ESV)

The disciples were afraid from the storm, but now more than the storm, they see their rabbi walking on the sea. They are terrified in the same way they were afraid when Jesus calmed the storm in chapter 4. They were afraid not of the storm, but of the realization that they were in the presence of God.

I love what Jesus said: **“take heart, it is I (I AM). Do not be afraid...”**

He greets them with the divine formula of self-revelation, “I am”.

Moses asked God’s name: “I AM who I AM.”

Isaiah describes God:

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD,

“and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.

Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.

¹¹ I, I am the LORD,

and besides me there is no savior. (Isaiah 43:10-11 ESV)

The disciples had a question, “Who is this that storm obeys him?”

They got the answer: I AM.

Next

⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:45-52 ESV)

Now you expect that they would experience God’s presence and understand everything.

Feeding the 5000, it seems they are wondering what is going on? Now, this event on the stormy sea, “Who is this whom the storms obey, who can walk on water and can say, I AM?”

Let me clarify that the disciples’ hardened hearts were not like those who had hardened hearts and were hostile towards him. The disciples may have been confused and blind, but they were not hostile against Jesus. No

When we go through the waters, God will be with us (Isaiah 43:16). We have the assurance of His presence in the midst of the dark, stormy sea. Now with this event, Jesus declares that the same God of the OT appears in him, and his presence will bring comfort. **“God is in their midst in the very person of Jesus.”**⁷

Application:

1. Why are we in the dark, stormy night?

There will be dark stormy nights, and God will allow this to happen. Welcome to the world.

Jesus wanted the disciples to be on their own. “God will never leave you or forsake you.” That is a promise, and God keeps His promise.

Sometimes we are in the boat rowing but not going anywhere. Discouragement knocks the door of our heart. Don’t give up: **take heart, it is I (I AM). Do not be afraid...**

God will use this “storm” to shape our character. I don’t like it, but it is the process of maturing in Christ.

2. Jesus reveals His character, His identity

“Take heart, it is I (I AM). Do not be afraid...”

“Jesus wants to show to his disciples a glimpse of his divinity in order to help them unravel the clues to his identity.”⁸ Walking on the water was not a visual stunt to

amaze the disciples. Rather, it is a miracle to show that God is there with them, theophany.

3. Did I miss when Jesus *passed by*?

If you remember the disciples came back from the mission field with success stories. Yet when Jesus fed the 5000, they did not understand it. **“And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”**(Mark 6:51-52)

What happened after all these wonderful experiences? It can happen with us. It happens with me. I wonder if some of those “success stories” made me unaware that Jesus is the center of my life and not my stories. I don’t want to miss Jesus when ***He passes by***.

Journal...

Or we are too busy to see Jesus passing by.

“We rarely see God walking past or recognize his blessing, bounty, or presence in our lives. We ought to reflect on similar experiences from our past where God met us but we were too dense to see it at the time. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we only recognize in retrospect who it was who appeared in our lives (Luke 24:13–35).”⁹

How do you feel today? Are you in a storm? Are you facing one? Are you afraid and alone? Are you enjoying His presence while you are in the middle of the storm?

Here is a prayer:

King David writes:

“Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray.

O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch (wait in anticipation).” (Psalm 5:1-3)

The Deer’s Cry ¹⁰

I arise today,
through the strength of heaven;
light of sun,
radiance of moon,
splendor of fire,

speed of lightning,
swiftness of the wind,
depth of the sea,
stability of earth,
firmness of rock.

I arise today,
through God's strength to pilot me;
God's eye to look before me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,

from all who shall wish me ill,
afar and a-near
alone and in a multitude.
Against every cruel
merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise, Christ to shield me.

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,

I arise today.....

1. The New York Times 01-18-2012
2. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, p. 335
3. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus through Galilee*, p. 74
4. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, p. 336
5. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Mark P 263
6. R.C. Sproul, *He Taught Them as One Who Had Authority Mark*, P 113
7. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Mark P 265
8. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Mark P 266

9. *ibid* p 267

10. Based upon St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer Anon. 8th century Translated from Irish by Kuno Meyer.