

Wednesday Reflection by David Kennedy

Reading: Mark 6. 45-52

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. ⁴⁹ 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." ⁵¹ Then 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.

This morning's Gospel is very appropriate for this the first week of the Epiphany. Epiphany means 'revealing' or 'manifesting' or 'uncovering'. In this season, we are invited to reflect on the meaning of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. What does it mean for God to become a human being, and how do we understand more of the nature of God, as we look on the words and deeds of Jesus?

So, this morning we have heard of Jesus walking on the water. The preceding passage is the great account of the Feeding of the 5,000. Jesus is revealed as the universal provider, a greater than Moses, who fed God's people with bread and fish in the wilderness. Mark 6 suggests that this Feeding miracle took place in the late afternoon: 'This is a deserted place and the hour is now very late'.

After feeding the people, Jesus then ascends a mountain – the hills around the Sea of Galilee, overlooking the Lake. As Jesus is a greater than Moses, like Moses, he goes up a mountain to speak with God. At evening time, the disciples get into the boat to row across the Lake to Capernaum. Night falls and the disciples experience thick darkness; it must have been disconcerting. What was Jesus doing? Well, Mark tells us he was praying. The disciples were in his sight, he could see them as he prayed for them on the hillside. Suddenly, the sea became very rough; there was a strong, contrary wind. The disciples were rowing against the wind. St John, in his account of this story, tells us they rowed for 3 or 4 miles; Galilee is about 7-8 miles wide, so they were half way across the Lake. Mark suggests that they were on the lake all night, rowing against the wind. And then Mark tells us that Jesus came to them early in the morning, perhaps as dawn was breaking. The disciples must have been totally exhausted. But Jesus comes to them walking on the sea. Mark makes the

intriguing comment that he was going to pass them by. Did he not care about them? Was he really ignoring them?

But seeing him walking on the Lake sent them into absolute terror; in fact, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But then, Jesus turns to them. St John tells us he said to them 'I AM' – the great Divine name that God first revealed to Moses. But Jesus tells them to 'take heart, and not to be afraid. Mark then tells us he got into the boat and the wind ceased. And the disciples, they were astounded.

Mark's Gospel is asking everyone who hears it or reads it, a simple question: Who is Jesus? Jesus' disciples, who saw him feed the multitudes, and walk on water, had not yet got it; the penny hadn't yet dropped.

Jesus is the greater than Moses; he is the one who can defy the laws of nature, who can even walk on a storm-tossed lake. Jesus was testing his disciples. Their whole experience of rowing against the wind all night; of coming to a point of sheer exhaustion, was to open their minds and hearts to an even greater revelation or epiphany. He is the one who is Lord of creation itself.

Sometimes, perhaps less dramatically, Jesus tests us. He invites us to launch out into the storms that sometimes come our way. Sometimes, we can feel afraid, as if he has forsaken us. But remember, his disciples were never out of his sight; he was praying for them constantly; he came to them, even though they thought he would pass them by. And ultimately he brought them to peace and to rest.

But there is a sting – even when he calmed the waves and was with them in the boat, Mark tells us their 'hearts were hardened'. The penny still hadn't quite dropped. But today we, in faith, come to him, with hearts open and a-tuned to his word. We gladly own him as a greater than Moses, as the Lord of creation, as God incarnate among us. We come to him in simple faith and trust.