

Pentecost 8B – Proper 12 (7/26/09 – *More Than Meets the Eye*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

In our *Holy Gospel* for this **8th Sunday after Pentecost**, we have the account of Jesus walking on the water as the Twelve flounder against a contrary wind. Earlier that evening Jesus had fed the 5,000 on only five loaves of bread and two fish – with 12 baskets of leftovers! Then He sent them on ahead while He dismissed the crowds and prayed. The Apostles had witnessed a great and miraculous event – the impossible had been overcome ... upwards of 15,000 people had been fed with what amounts to not more than a young boy's snack.

But now another trial confronted the Disciples. Out on the Sea of Galilee, the winds were contrary. That happens out there ... the winds would come rushing over the hills ... and swirl on the sea. Mariners typically stayed fairly close to the land, even on something as small as the Sea of Galilee. But those swirling winds would push the boat away from the shore ... and make it impossible to get back in. Our text says ***that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them*** [Mk 6.48]. That could also be rendered something like: *they were being severely tested in their rowing* or even *they were being severely tormented or tortured in their rowing*. Imagine the scene if you will – vividly. The Twelve Apostles are in the boat after a long, tiring day. And even though there are experts among them – Peter and Andrew, James and John ... professional fishermen only recently redirected by Christ to a new vocation – this wind is so strong and contrary, that even **they** cannot make any headway. They not only had a long day, but it came after a long missionary journey – and their rest and recuperation had been interrupted by those 5,000 men (plus women and children) ... waiting there for them when they got to shore. Every muscle exhausted ... every joint sore ... soaked from head to toe ... cold ... and hearts full of anguish.

The summer after my freshman year in High School, my family came “out West” to visit an aunt and uncle. And on the way here or back – I don't recall – we stayed in a cabin right on Yellowstone Lake. We went fishing, and my Dad wanted to rent a little motorboat. But being young and tough and “indestructible,” I talked him into a rowboat instead. A storm came up as we were heading back in. I kept rowing toward the docks – but the wind was against us. Pretty soon I couldn't keep up. My dad joined in the rowing and we each took an oar. Even with both of us on the oars, we couldn't make any headway – in fact, the very moment we paused in our strokes, we lost a lot of ground. It seemed hopeless. If it hadn't been for a speedboat with a toe-line, we would have been blown helplessly to the farthest shore. My ego was shattered – I wasn't as strong as I thought ... I wasn't as tough as I thought ... I wasn't indestructible at all! I was only beaten, sore, and tired ... and in the morning I ached from stem to stern.

Trials and tribulations – the winds of life that blow steadily against us – can be disheartening ... but educating. We are **not** as strong and tough as we sometimes think – and we're **definitely not** indestructible. No doubt the Disciples feared for their very lives – and the welfare of their families, if they should perish, surely entered their minds and caused them great anxiety.

Then they see Jesus headed their way – walking on top of the wind-blown, choppy waters. *It's a ghost!*, they think – but they should have known ... they'd seen this before. They cry out in distress and fear – utterly terrified. And even when Jesus speaks kindly to them, saying: *Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.* (more literally: *Take courage; I AM. Stop being afraid.*), and gets into the boat with them – causing the wind to cease – the Disciples were *utterly astonished* (more literally: *they began to be out of their senses*). They were beside themselves ... totally flabbergasted. At first we might think that was in a good sense – that they were happily astounded. But then Mark adds this inspired comment: *for they did not understand about the loaves, for their heart was hardened* [6.52]. The Disciples **still** didn't get it. You see, there was *More Than Meets the Eye* to this Jesus ... **much** more. It wasn't **just** that He could do miracles – **that** they had seen ... in abundance. And even, when Jesus had calmed that other storm a while back, they didn't get it. All the signs and proofs – the fulfillment of Scripture – that should have pointed them to the reality of Who Jesus was were there; but they missed it ... did not understand.

It is a lack of faith on their part – not just a lack of understanding. They don't yet rightly know and believe in Jesus ... as He is. They haven't gotten yet that multiplying loaves and fish and curing diseases and walking on water and calming storms are all just the tip of the iceberg ... and as nothing to Jesus – that He's the same God Who created heaven and earth and all that is in them from absolutely nothing ... simply by His will and Word. There is *More Than Meets the Eye* to Jesus.

That's a lesson we need to learn as well. Our economy ... our illnesses ... the frailty of these bodies we have ... the opposition of many sectors of our society to the truth and teachings of the Christian faith ... the daily and weekly and sometimes sudden and seemingly devastating trials and tribulations of our lives – all of these problems ... all of these contrary winds ... are as nothing to Christ, our Lord and Creator and Savior. With a mere word He can cause all of our problems to be stilled. With a mere touch He can strengthen feeble hands and weak knees. If only we might touch the fringe of His garment, we will be made well ... whole ... saved ... in body and in soul.

Sometimes it may look and seem to us that Jesus means to pass us by ... is

about to go beyond us ... without stopping to aid us [MK 6.48]. But let us consider our text carefully. First verse 48 says that Jesus *came to them* – actually, Mark is a bit more vivid ... Jesus *comes to them*. If He truly meant to pass them by ... without aiding ... He could have easily gone another route. Christ *comes* to them – as He comes to us – that we might see Him and our eyes might be turned from our contrary winds to Him. It *seems* that Jesus would pass us by – for having made us His own through Holy Baptism, He has promised that He *will never leave you nor forsake you* [HEB 13.5]. In reality, Jesus *continually* comes to us ... and would lead us on to the promised shore.

When the wind and the waves of life all seem contrary ... when you are tired and exhausted ... know that your Savior Jesus Christ comes to you – here ... in this place ... now. He does not pass you by – after all, He has climbed into the boat of this life with you ... having taken into Himself our humanity ... with all the weaknesses of our human flesh. He has gotten into the boat with us – literally put Himself in the same boat with us. He has made Himself weak – so He knows and understands and is compassionate concerning our weaknesses. He has made Himself sinner – though He was without sin – so He knows and understands the burden of sin that we bear. And in getting into the boat with us – uniting Himself to us and our sinful situation – He has done more than merely sympathize and empathize with us. In Himself, He has taken on all the contrary winds ... and silenced them.

Sin ... death ... devil ... hell – in Jesus they are conquered and silenced. The righteous punishment we deserve for our own contrariness to God's Word and will – He has taken it upon Himself in our stead. What ill wind can blow against us – really ... what can go against us if Christ has made Himself for us and gotten into the boat with us? Nothing in the end! For God has shown you *what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* [EPH 3.18-19]. Let me show it to you this way ... we have to rearrange the word order just a bit: *what is the ... height and depth* | ... the *breadth and length* — ... of His love that surpasses our knowledge and understanding.

Christ *is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think* [3.20]. There is *More Than Meets the Eye* to our Jesus. The multiplying of the loaves and fish teach us that Jesus is the God of Creation – the God Who creates from nothing ... the God Who hovers over the chaotic waters and brings forth order and life ... the God Who reveals to Noah His plan to destroy the sinful world and start it anew ... then guards and protects Noah and his family in the Ark ... the God Who establishes His covenant with Noah and His offspring (**to us!**) ... and sets His rainbow in the clouds as a reminder. And notice carefully, dear Christian friends, just how God speaks in our *Old Testament* reading. *When the bow is in the*

clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. [GEN 9.16] The rainbow should remind us every time we see it of God's promises – not only the ones here, but all of them. But even more than that – the rainbow is a reminder to God. Think of it this way: whenever the storms of life arise, remember that with every storm there is a rainbow that reminds God of His gracious love toward you because Christ set Himself in the sky – being lifted up from the earth upon the cross – to show *what is the height and depth and breadth and length* ✕ *of the love of Christ that surpasses our knowledge.* God will keep you safe ... and bring you home.

Christ has gotten into the boat with us ... and yet has also gone ahead of us to prepare the way ... leading us to the promised shore of paradise in heaven. And in His Word and Sacraments, you also receive *More Than Meets the Eye*. For here Christ comes again to you – gets into the boat of this world and life with you – to forgive you, give you life, and grant you His eternal salvation. And as many as touch the fringe of His garment are saved [MK 6.56].

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]