

October 31, 2021 Doing The Impossible Matthew 14:22-35

There is background we need to be aware of as we approach the reading which begins at verse 22 of John 14. Immediately before the story beginning in verse 22, Jesus fed the 5,000. I want to point out to you that it was a bigger miracle than we read about in the headline over that story. It says, and the headings have been added by the publisher to tell us what we are going to read in the following verses. It seems obvious. John tells us two other details about that miracle. And by the way, I have stood where Jesus and the disciples stood when this event occurred. On the surface, like every one of the Biblical miracles, our first reaction is, “wow, that’s impossible.” Not with God. And the whole point of Biblical “miracle stories” is that God was and is involved. And as George Beverly Shea used to sing, “It is no secret what God can do.”

Every miracle story associated with the ministry of Jesus is about that fact that God revealed Himself in human form in Jesus. It is the chief sign that Jesus is indeed, the Christ, the Messiah, the One who was promised in the prophecies of the Old Testament.

First question about the portion we are studying this day: Why did Jesus not depart when the boat sailed with the disciples? It is very simple. And it is in the text. Jesus stayed behind to dismiss the crowd. John tells us two things about that crowd. First of all, there were women and children present, whole families. In typical Jewish style we are given the number

of the men. Five thousand men. But there were women and children present. John tells us they all ate and were satisfied. You know about satisfied. We typically say, "I'm full." Or "I've had enough thank you." As I said, I stood on the shore of Galilee where this happened. Some of my fellow pilgrims waded in the water. We were not eager to leave the place. Neither were the 10 to 20,000 or more who were present at the time of the miracle. They lingered.

I think it is fascinating that Jesus, having fed them all, assumed responsibility for dispersing the crowd. He did not assign crowd control to the disciples. HE had shepherded the flock through the experience of being taught, and then being fed. HE shepherds them through the time that follows, and HE personally sends them back to their homes. John witnessed the feeding of the multitude. 5,000 men, with their women and children. John was there when Jesus sent the disciples to Gennesaret in the boat. As they pulled away from shore, John could see Jesus interacting with the people as HE began the process of sending them home.

After Jesus had dismissed the crowd, HE went up on the mountainside by HIMSELF to pray. I am sure HE was tired. I am certain HE knew the significance of what had happened. Another miracle, is another sign. HE was aware. The disciples were aware. Even some in the crowd who had departed were aware. Signs of God's power and love are not easily disregarded. Mary remembered all these things and cherished them in her heart. John and Peter, James and Andrew,

Judas...are no different. They know what they have heard and seen. They know they are participating in an extremely special journey.

From the mountainside Jesus can see by the moonlight, and the light of the stars that the boat is far from shore, and the men are struggling to make headway. The boat has one sail. They are trying to sail against the wind. Even I know, that means they have to tack, to make any headway at all. Into the wind, it takes a lot of time to go from point A to point B. And the winds are treacherous on the Sea of Galilee. So...Jesus walks to them. He walks on the water. It is impossible. But HE is the Christ, anointed by God to redeem. He walks on the water. And yes. HE does the impossible. John gives a time stamp. It is the 4th watch of the night, that is somewhere between 3:00 am. and 6:00 am. And in a superstitious world, it is after the witching hour. That is the primary Halloween comment for this day.

In spite of their faith, when the disciples saw a figure walking on the water toward them, in the darkness, they panicked. There was no quiet concern. They are shaking in their sandals, and they are certain it is a ghost. How certain? When Jesus hears them cry out in fear, HE calls out to them across the water. "Take courage. The KJV says the words actually mean, be of good cheer, have hope, it is I, don't be afraid."

Peter tends to be the one in this band of 12 who regularly says something and sometimes puts his foot in his

mouth. Peter reveals by what he says, he is not convinced it is Jesus. And if it is not Jesus, it is likely an evil spirit that means to do them harm. But Peter's words take us to the edge of the problem of doing the impossible. "If it is you Lord." Notice that Peter is not convinced. But if it is you, "tell me to come to you on the water." There is something here to be encouraged by. My translation of what Peter says is, "if it's you, and I'm not convinced it is, tell me to come to you on the water....because it is obvious YOU Lord, can do anything."

And Jesus said, "Come." Frankly, a number of replies come to mind. And at least one of them I would not repeat in church. Why? Because. This is the most terrifying place to which the journey of faith leads us. To which the journey of faith in Jesus will lead us. HE will ask us to do something. No! HE commands us to do something, we are convinced is impossible. "Come to me on the water," is not an invitation, and it is not a request. It is a command. An order.

If you will recall there was a Roman Centurion, whose servant, more than a servant, a dear friend, they had been through the wars together, said to Jesus through some local rabbis, "I'm not worthy to have you step into my house. I'm a Gentile. YOU are a Jew. But I understand how a chain of command works. I give orders to those who serve under me all the time. When I give an order, soldiers obey. If God is with you just give the order. And my servant will be well."

The order has been given. Peter walked into that one. Now what does he do? Peter steps down out of the boat. I have seen bigger canoes than a 2000 year old fishing boat dug out of the mud and preserved for us to see, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. But Peter does it. He understands the relationship between a Master, and his disciples. It calls for unquestioning obedience. And Peter obeys. This story lays bare the greatness of every disciple of Jesus, and the weakness of every disciple of Jesus. We get asked to do the impossible. To lead others in prayer in public, or to do something where we know there will be consequences. And there are always consequences. But Peter does it. And then there Peter is: the boat is back there, the waves rise and roll, the wind howls in his ears. Peter took baby steps. Now he is thrashing about in the water.

Jesus catches hold of him. Jesus says, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt." The reason Peter doubted is that the thought like a lightning bolt whipped through his mind. This is impossible. I can't." And so, he didn't.

And look at what Peter cried out in his desperation! "Lord save me!" And of course, that is precisely what Jesus did. Jesus lifted Peter up out of the surf, and HE helped Peter get into the boat. And then HE got into the boat. And the wind stopped howling, and the Galilee became calm. The disciples who had remained in the boat the whole time worshipped HIM. And they said, "You are truly the Son of God."

It is interesting how things unfold. In Mark's Gospel we are told what happened when they arrived at Gennesaret. Jesus healed the demoniac named Legion for he was indwelt with many evil spirits. We tend to think that's impossible. I tell you it explains a lot of the things that people do which do not make sense. Violent, horrible crimes that seem to have no explanation. Legion was set free, saved if you will, after the storm on Galilee and Peter's being commanded to do the.....impossible.

You see when Jesus calls us to do the impossible, a number of things suddenly become possible. Not because we are good or powerful, but because Jesus Christ is Lord. Think about it. Pray about it. Remember this story of the storm winds on Galilee, when God asks you, No, commands you, to do the impossible.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus we are afraid when we believe that we have been asked to do things that are not possible. Our logic limits us. We fail to see the possibilities. And we lose sight of the fact that you are the Son of God, who can redeem anyone, everyone, and even make use of us to your greater glory. Help us to believe and not to doubt, to believe and not to give into fear. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen