

January 30th, 2011
Sermon

Text: Mark 6:45-52

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. {46} And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. {47} Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. {48} Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. {49} And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; {50} for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." {51} Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. {52} For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

Don't Be Surprised By God's Great Love in Action

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

Expect the unexpected. This is a motto that we may take when we watch a movie mystery. We dismiss the obvious and try to figure out "who done it." Reporters love the unexpected whether it's the Red Sox coming back to win the playoffs or a candidate coming from behind to win the election.

What about expecting the expected? That's boring. Yet when it comes to God's love and mercy we do well to expect the expected. We give ourselves unnecessary grief when underestimate the power of God. We present ourselves with unnecessary problems when we overestimate our own strength and power.

Today as we consider the familiar account of Jesus walking on the water, we remember to expect the expected from our gracious God and Savior. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive His message.

1. Not limiting Him to human standards

One reason that we may be surprised at God's love and power is that we attempt to drag Him down to our level. We think of how we would react in a situation and incorrectly assume that God would do the same thing. Or we may get so used to our own limited power and thinking that we forget that God does not have those limitations.

Just consider the background to our text. Approximately twelve hours before the disciples found themselves floundering in the middle of the Sea of Galilee they had witnessed one of the more famous of Jesus' miracles. He had taken five loaves of bread and two fish and fed 5000 people producing some twelve baskets of leftovers. By this time they had witnessed other miracles of healings, they had been with Him when He stilled the storm, but you would think that at least the miracle of the loaves as it is referred to later on, at least this one would be fresh in their minds.

So here they are in the middle of a fierce storm unable

to gain ground. They had been rowing all night and must have been thoroughly exhausted. They needed Jesus more than ever. They knew He had the power to help them. He had told them that He would be following them, and yet they were surprised to see Him coming. In fact, they did not even recognize Him. Instead they reverted to superstition supposing Him to be some sort of ghost.

When Jesus was on the ship and the storm had stopped we read that "they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. For they had not understood about the loaves because their hearts were hardened." Shortly after this many of Jesus' followers would leave Him because He was not the type of Messiah that they wanted. At times the twelve apostles also had a tiny faith, knowing that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, but not knowing what this meant for the world and for them.

This was a human reaction that the disciples had. It's not unlike our reaction at times to the love and power of God. We believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. We have read numerous times of His miracles and have the proof of the Old Testament prophecies that He is the Son of God, but there are times that we put limits on Him.

When we find ourselves in some dilemma what do we do? We may panic. We may get despondent. We may get angry. We may become fearful. If that is the case, then we are forgetting the power of Jesus. We are underestimating His love. We are forgetting about the promises of God and His ability and determination to fulfill them.

Some promises may seem even more outlandish than walking on water. He assures us complete forgiveness through the shedding of His blood. At times that is something that we feel we can't dare believe, but thank God it is true. He has promised to shepherd us and be with us. Even though at times we may feel very alone, God has never forsaken or forgotten us. He has promised that His Word is effective to increase our faith. He has promised that prayer is effective and heard by Him. He has promised His true body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Don't limit God to our human standards and expect Him to fail. Expect the divine. Expect Jesus to come walking across the water. Expect Jesus to follow through on His promises to you when your eyes and maybe even your heart would be telling you differently. God is greater than that. We are losing out on blessings if Jesus would say to us - as He did in Matthew's account -, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Be amazed by that love of God, but don't be surprised. After all God has told you exactly what He would do.

2. Expecting His love to continue

This love and power will continue. Expect that. Rely on that. There are times that we hesitate because we've been burned before by putting our trust in other people. Apprehension can be there in human relationships, and sometimes we say that trust has to be earned. But in our relationship with God we find every reason to wholeheartedly put our trust in Him.

We are told that Jesus compelled His disciples to get into

the boat. This was a strong urging. I wonder what they were thinking as the wind picked up and the waves started crashing onto the boat. Why did Jesus want us to do this? And yet there was a divine purpose to it. The disciples were further enlightened and God was glorified.

How many times have you done what God has told you to do, and felt the same way? When we serve God and do the right thing we may feel cursed instead of blessed. That is not seeing God's love in action.

Look to Jesus and see in Him the reason for trust. He came to this earth to fulfill the plan of redemption laying down His life in place of yours. The Lord has never once let us down and kept every promise that He has ever made. His love has not wavered. His faithfulness has never been set aside. You are the focus of God's love and attention, and in following Him and His commands you will most certainly be blessed both in eternity and in time. The world can scoff and have its own view, but those who belong to Christ are loved and remain God's children. Stand in awe at that love of God which knows no limit.

We do want to be awed by God's love. When we stop recognizing the extraordinary nature of God's love, this is the first step to despising it. There have been times that we have been half-hearted in our love for God. There have been times that we have been hard-hearted. Not only have we been of little faith, there was a time that we were of no faith. Yet the fact remains that God brought us into His family. Jesus continues to plead our case, and has never stopped working in His goal to take you to heaven. Worship then with joy on your lips, praise in your hearts, and thanksgiving in your actions.

Come before His presence with thanksgiving recognizing His undeserved and unconditional love for what it is. Watch in awe as you see forgiveness change hearts not only as it enters, but also as it exits. Try it and see.

At the same time don't be in shock when God works out things for the good in your life. In fact, you can expect it, and depend upon it. Don't be surprised that God hears and answers your prayers according to what is best for you. His love prepares us to put our wholehearted trust in Him.

God's plans work and His love continues. With God expect the ... expected. Not our expectations, but His. You will never be let down in relying on God's love and power. Amen.