

The Drawing Power of Jesus

Mark 6:45-56

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Have you ever noticed that grandparents love to show pictures of their grandchildren to every one they meet? It's like they can't help it. I've never understood that so now that Beth and I are first-time grandparents I'm going to resist inundating you with pictures of our grandson named Philip...OK, that didn't last. Have I shown you pictures of Pip?

Pictures capture moments in time and help us remember key events. Two weeks ago, Pastor Ed gave us a snapshot of John the Baptist and challenged us to always speak the truth, no matter the consequences. Last weekend Pastor Tim gave us a picture of how Jesus multiplied a young lad's lunchable into a meal for a multitude in order to teach us that with Christ the impossible is always possible.

Mark 6:43 tells us what happened after every one was done eating: ***“And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.”*** Each of the disciples filled a doggy bag to remind them of what Jesus had done.

As we dive into our passage today we're going to be served a seven course spiritual meal as we simply walk through these verses and allow God's Word to feed us. Are you ready to eat?

1. Obey even when you don't understand. Let's begin in Mark 6:45: ***“Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.”*** Mark loves to use the word ***“immediately”*** to help us see that Jesus moves quickly from one encounter to the next. In this case it seems rather abrupt, doesn't it? After this amazing miracle, we read that Jesus ***“made his disciples get into the boat.”*** This is the word for ***“compelled”*** and has the idea of the disciples being pushed into the boat. In Matthew 8:18, it says that Jesus ***“gave orders”*** to them.

Too many of us want to know all the details before we decide to obey. It's like we have to figure out the *why* instead of just saying, ***“God, whatever you want me to do, I'll do it.”***

I'm sure this doesn't make sense to the disciples but frankly it doesn't have to. John 6:14-15 reveals that the people wanted ***"to take Jesus by force"*** and make Him king. Jesus deploys the disciples and then he dismisses the crowd because He doesn't want any part of a political coup.

Are you struggling with obedience today? Is there anything you're resisting simply because it doesn't make sense to you? Keep Isaiah 55:8-9 in mind: ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*** You may be spiritually stuck simply because you're demanding to understand before you'll obey.

2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself. Look at verse 46: ***"And after He had taken leave of them, He went up on the mountain to pray."*** We saw earlier in Mark 1:35 that it was the custom of Christ to meet with His Father in prayer: ***"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."*** He unplugged from others in order to plug into prayer.

The Bible says that there are at least three things that Jesus prays for.

- **For our faith to not fail.** In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says to Peter: ***"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."***
- **That we stay away from sin and Satan.** Jesus prays for His followers in John 17:15: ***"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."***
- **That we experience undivided unity.** The heart of Jesus is for harmony among the family of faith as seen in John 17:20-21: ***"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [that's you and me] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*** When we exhibit oneness, our witness to the world will be powerful and palpable.

I attended a community-wide prayer time last Sunday night at Word of Life Church in Rock Island. It was put together in response to the racial tension in our

country and in the Quad Cities. Approximately 100 people of various races attended, including pastors from many different churches. I had the privilege of being one of the pastors to lead in prayer and started by reading Ephesians 2:14: ***“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...”***

We interceded for the African American community and we prayed for Law Enforcement. Several white pastors prayed and then an African American pastor cried out for God to bring repentance and revival to our churches and the whole room exploded with applause and exclamations of Amen.

Since Jesus made prayer a priority, we must do the same. In our team time on Tuesday, I challenged our staff to pray more. I’m calling for more prayer at EBC. When we gather in groups, let’s pray. When we meet as classes, let’s pray. When we talk on the phone, end your conversation with prayer. We’ll be focusing on prayer on Sunday nights this fall. We’ve signed Edgewood up to be a host site for a nationwide simulcast for women called, “Cry Out Prayer” on Friday, September 23. Bill and Myrna Orris’ class has been meeting for prayer on Tuesday nights and had an extended time of intercession this past Sunday afternoon. Prayer must permeate all we do.

Let me be clear. The problems in our country won’t be solved by politicians, or by people protesting, but only by prayer. Social transformation will only come about when the church is spiritually transformed. I read an article this week called, “Spiritual Awakening Brings Societal Transformation” by Bob Bakke. Here’s his conclusion after reflecting on the impact of the Great Awakening in the early 1800s: *“Time after time, in nation after nation, the pattern is the same. When the Holy Spirit moves, lives are transformed. And when those transformed lives start loving others, serving with compassion, adopting God’s priorities, and sharing the gospel boldly, the surrounding community starts to change.”*

Tony Evans, an evangelical African American pastor, wrote an article for the Washington Post this week in which he said, *“Our troubles can be traced directly to ineffective Christians...there needs to be a recalibrating of many of our churches to the unified purpose of the kingdom of God...unless the church steps forward collectively to fulfill its God-given role of influencing the conscience of our culture, our country will keep spiraling downward into the depths of fear and hate.”*

So, let's pray and let's take great comfort in the fact that Jesus is praying for us. Hebrews 7:25: "***Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.***" Romans 8:34 says this about Jesus: "***who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.***"

Let's pray right now. As you know, there was another terrorist attack in France Thursday night, leaving over 80 dead. Our world seems out of whack and people are nervous about what might happen next. It's time for us to respond with the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First, we're to obey when we don't understand and second, let's remember that Jesus is praying when we can't pray for ourselves. That leads to the third course.

3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be. Look at verse 47: "***And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.***" It's now getting dark and the disciples are out in the deep water. We know this from Matthew 14:24, which says that they were a "***long way from the land.***" This was just supposed to be a short shoreline cruise and now they are way off course. I wonder if some of the disciples started singing: "*Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip, that started from this tropic port, aboard this tiny ship. The mate was a mighty sailor man, Peter, brave and sure. 12 passengers set sail that day for a three-hour tour. The weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed...*"

Some of you feel like you're in deep water today. As a society we seem to be out on the sea, a long way from solid ground. But the disciples are together. This was no time for arguing or fighting. It was a time to pull together and not dwell on their differences.

Team, we're all in the same boat, aren't we? In order to demonstrate this, I'd like you to stand right now and reach out and grab someone's hand. If you're on the end of a pew, go ahead and cross the aisle and take someone's hand. The person you are now touching is made in the image of God. He or she may be a different gender than you, belong to a different political party, represent a different generation, from a different community or state, live in a different size house than you, or have different colored skin than you do. You might be in management and the person you are touching could belong to a union. You might be a Cardinals fan

and you're holding the hand of a Cubs fan or you might be a Packers fan and the poor guy next to you roots for the Bears.

This is a bit uncomfortable, isn't it? Don't let go yet. It's time to repent of any smug feelings of superiority and all racist thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. Here are a couple practical steps to take this week.

- **Have a conversation with someone of a different skin color.** Let's enter into awkward conversations by intentionally moving toward someone who looks different than we do. For those of us who are white, let's tell a person of color that we care about them. I've been doing that this week and it has led to some wonderful discussions. I introduced myself to a black man at the Mobile Ultrasound Van Dedication on Friday and asked him what message I could give to my church. He smiled and suggested that we all work on empathy. I talked to someone who lives on the west end of Rock Island and she told me that her community is filled with fear and some are really angry right now. Let's face it. Edgewood is up "on the hill" and we're not as connected to the west end of Rock Island and Davenport as we should be.
- **Thank a Law Enforcement officer for what he or she does.** I went up to three guys from the sheriff's department when I was at La Rancherita for lunch on Wednesday and told them that pastors in this community met to pray for them this past Sunday night. They smiled and thanked me profusely.

In a sermon I preached on rooting out racism last year, I made this appeal: *"Let's make Edgewood ethnically and racially diverse and yet harmonious and united. This is a place of grace for discussions about race. We **gather** together no matter our skin color or background. We **grow** together because we can't grow alone. We **give** to each other because of what we've been given. And we **go** with the gospel to people who are different from us because the dividing wall of hostility has been knocked down by the gospel. That includes the nations living next door as God has brought refugees to us and it also includes our neighbors in the QCA and the nations around the world."* OK, you can stop holding hands now.

1. Obey when you don't understand.
2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself.
3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be.

I love this next morsel of truth...

4. Jesus sees you when you can't see Him. The disciples are a long way from shore and they can't see the Savior. The crowds have dispersed and Jesus is by Himself praying and yet verse 48 says: ***“And He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.”*** Let's ponder an obvious point. Jesus sent them into this storm on purpose. Beware of preachers and authors who tell you that it is never God's will for the child of God to suffer or go through hard times.

We know from John's account that the disciples were three to four miles from land and yet Jesus could see that...

- **They were in pain and not making much progress.** The word ***“painfully”*** means, *“to torment and torture.”* They were not making much headway but they were rowing hard. I wonder if one of the upbeat disciples borrowed a line from Dory in Find Nemo: *“Rowing, rowing, just keep rowing.”*
- **The wind was against them.** In John's account we read this is a ***“great wind”*** that was contrary to them, kind of like the storm that blew through here on Wednesday afternoon. The Christian life is not always smooth sailing, is it? While we have some mountain top experiences, like our Ignite singles group experienced when camping last weekend, and what our junior highers felt at Camp Forest Springs two weeks ago and how our high schoolers felt who just returned from Colorado late Friday night, life is actually difficult and dark down in the valley. Blessings come in the midst of burdens and battles and buffetings. Acts 14:22 says, ***“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”***

Take comfort that the Savior sees you when you're struggling. You have not been forgotten or abandoned. 1 Peter 5:7: ***“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”***

Let's summarize.

1. Obey when you don't understand.
2. Jesus prays for you when you can't pray for yourself.
3. Jesus puts you where you don't always want to be.

4. Jesus sees you when you can't see Him.

Next, we see that Jesus comes to us when we're in crisis...but not always on our timetable.

5. Deliverance is often delayed until it's the darkest. Look at the second half of verse 48: *“And about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea...”* There is no doubt the disciples would have wanted Jesus to bail them out earlier but Jesus waited until His perfect time. The fourth watch took place between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. If you put the timing together, the disciples had been straining against the wind and the waves for 8 or 9 hours, and they were getting nowhere.

They can't get to Jesus but He makes His way to them. Don't you love that He knew exactly where they were? To see Jesus walking on the sea should have taken their minds to Job 9:8: *“Who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea”* and Psalm 77:19: *“The Lord's way was in the sea and His paths in mighty waters.”*

I'm sure that gave the disciples quite a fright to see Jesus walking on the water. I learned this week that there's a lizard that can run on water. Zoologists call him the “Jesus Christ Lizard.” I've seen Lexi Kargl and the Backwater Gamblers ski on water, but I've never seen a man walk on water. Have you?

Jesus comes to the disciples at their point of deepest need at the darkest time of night when they are the most discouraged. Have you ever experienced that?

→ **Missionary Interview.** This summer we're shining the spotlight on what God is doing around the globe through our Go Team partners. We have a team in Puerto Rico right now and we'll hear from them in two weeks. Today we have Jim Smith with us from Japan.

- Can you describe the ministry God has given you and Amy in Japan?
- How did God use your internship at EBC to equip you?
- We've just discovered in our passage that Jesus sees us even when we can't see Him. How has this truth encouraged you?
- Can you share a story about how God delivered a Japanese man or woman during their darkest time?

We tend to think that our biggest problem is whatever we're facing right now. Jesus wants us to know that all of our answers are found in Him.

6. Your greatest need is to see Jesus for who He is. Go back to the end of verse 48 and let's pick up a curious phrase: "...*He meant to pass by them.*" What does that mean? Was He intending to just walk on by? Actually, this is the same language used in Exodus 33:19 when God said that He would make His goodness "*pass before*" Moses and then proclaim His name as "*the Lord.*" Jesus was not trying to hide His identity but was actually revealing His glory and goodness.

Verse 49 and the first part of verse 50 tells us that when the disciples see Jesus they think he's a water Pokémon, or something like that: "*But when they saw Him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw Him and were terrified...*" You've heard of the Pokémon Go craze, haven't you? People have been coming into our parking lot looking for Pokémon so we decided to welcome them on our sign. I introduced myself to a teenager Friday morning when she was riding in our lot.

The word for "*ghost*" is *phantasma*, or *phantom*. It was a common cultural belief that to see a ghost was a sign that death was imminent. This was not a little whimper as the phrase "*cry out*" refers to a shrieking scream from someone thrown into deep panic.

What do you think the disciples' biggest need is at this point? Is it to have the storm die down? Is their biggest need to get to shore? Is it to feel better about themselves so they can have their best life now? Listen. The number one thing they need is to increase their awe of the Almighty. Jen Wilken puts it like this: "*Our primary problem is not a lack of self-worth. It's that we lack awe. Don't tell me who I am until you have caused me to gaze in awe at 'I AM.'*"

Let's lock in now to the last phrase of verse 50 where we read that Jesus spoke to them and said, "*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*" The phrase, "*take heart*" means, "*to be brave, get a grip.*" Notice that we're not called to draw on something within us but rather to lean on the Lord. He doesn't say, "*You are amazing and strong and incredible*" but rather, "*Take heart; it is I.*"

Jesus is using the emphatic personal pronoun that would remind the disciples of Exodus 3:14: "*God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'*" Jesus is equating Himself with Yahweh Himself as we saw in our recent sermon series, "Metaphors of the

Messiah.” I love John 8:58: **“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’”** He’s really saying something like this, *“There’s no need to fear because I AM is here!”*

This week Ray Pritchard posted this on his blog: Twenty years ago Dr. E. V. Hill preached a powerful sermon at a Promise Keepers gathering in Chicago...on just two words: *“God is.”* He said it over and over again. He whispered it and he shouted it. He illustrated it, declared it, proclaimed it, and dared anyone to deny it. It wouldn’t seem likely that you could preach that long on just two words, but he did, and when you think about it, you could preach a lot longer when your topic is as profound as *“God is.”* Once you get it settled in your heart that *“God is,”* a lot of other problems will be solved as well.

By the way, in Mark’s account we don’t read of Peter getting out of the boat to walk on the water. You can read about that in Matthew. I think Mark leaves it out because Peter is the one giving an account of the message and miracles of Jesus. Peter has grown in humility and doesn’t want the attention or maybe it’s because he doesn’t want to be reminded that he sank when he took his eyes off Jesus. Say all you want about Peter, at least he got out of the boat! As John Ortberg says, *“If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.”*

There’s one more morsel to chew on today.

7. Be on guard against a hard heart. Have you ever wondered how the disciples could be so dense? They’ve just witnessed the feeding of thousands but they haven’t connected the dots. We’re the same way aren’t we? God has been faithful in the past but we forget about that in the present. Check out verses 51-52: **“*And He got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loves, but their hearts were hardened.*”**

To be **“utterly astounded”** means to be bewildered beyond belief or literally, *“to leave one’s mouth wide open in surprise.”* Jesus walked on the water and then the wind ceased. Because they forgot to look at their doggy bags filled with leftovers, they didn’t think the Lord could help them in the storm. Tragically, it says, **“*their hearts were hardened.*”**

Listen. If you don’t lock in and learn what the Lord is trying to teach you, it’s likely that you’ll get hardened. Hebrews 3:13 urges us, **“*But exhort one another*”**

every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

It’s interesting that the disciples’ hearts were hardened but when the boat hits the shore, we read that the people in general were humble and hungry for help in verses 53-56: *“When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.”*

So here’s a question. Is your heart hard or is it hungry? I’m going to put the preaching points up on the screen and you pick one that you most need to focus on this week.

1. Obey even when you don’t understand
2. Jesus prays for you when you can’t pray for yourself
3. Jesus puts you where you don’t always want to be
4. Jesus sees you when you can’t see Him
5. Deliverance is often delayed until it’s the darkest
6. Your greatest need is to see Jesus for who He is
7. Be on guard against a hard heart

When I see pictures of our grandson Pip I’m reminded of God’s faithfulness. What do you carry around to remind you of the power of Jesus over your problems? God is on the move. Will you join Him?

Closing Song: “Amazed”