

Introduction

1. It's been three years ago since I had my first encounter with South Holston Lake.
 - a. At the church picnic, I took out a kayak for a spin from the point of Washington Co. Park to the far shore and back.
 - b. About halfway back, the kayak had become partially filled with water, from a small leak, my poor paddling, or perhaps both.
 - c. I decided to dump out of the kayak, empty the water, and hold onto the back of it while kicking for the point. I had on a life-jacket and am a good swimmer—lifeguard certified back in the day.
 - d. Deborah and some others saw me in the water. They thought I was in trouble. Truly, I was not. However, they were terrified. Deborah, not the greatest swimmer, put on two life-vests and grabbed an inner-tube for good measure. She ran down to the shore and was on the way to save me.
 - e. Fortunately, I encouraged her to stay on shore as I arrived safely but a bit tired back on dry land.
 - f. It would have been nice that day to have stood up and walked back to shore on the water or for Deborah to walk out to me and pull me in. Of course, neither of those things happened for me.
 - g. In today's passage, Jesus' disciples are caught rowing hard in another storm on the Sea of Galilee.
 - h. Suddenly, Jesus, who had stayed behind on the shore, came out to them walking on the water. They were terrified at first, but Jesus calmed them and the storm.
2. **Read Mk 6:45-56.**

A. The Benediction (45-46)

1. "Immediately" (Gk. *ethus*) – The action continues from the end of the Feeding of the 5000 into the next passage, perhaps one of the most spectacular of Jesus' miracles as He walks on the water.
2. Jesus dismissed His disciples to go ahead of Him to "Bethsaida" on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Only Mark gives the detail of their destination. Matthew does not specify it, and John gives it as Capernaum (Jn 6:17).
3. Jesus then dismissed (Gk., *apoluei*) the crowd to return to their homes filled with both food and His teachings in the gathering darkness of late evening.
4. Jesus' day was not over. He "went upon a mountainside to pray."
 - a. As he had in the past, Jesus needed a time apart (cf., Mk 1:35, 6:31).
 - b. He needed a time to be alone with His Father and to re-energize after a long day of ministry.
 - c. John's gospel indicates that Jesus had to make His escape from the crowd because ". . .they intended to come and make him king by force" after miraculously providing them with food (Jn 6:15) in the preceding miraculous narrative of the Feeding of the 5000.
5. Where did the feeding of the 5000 take place?
 - a. There are many conflicting explanations of the geographical setting for the Feeding of the 5000 and the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. While the exact details are not as important as the meaning of these narratives, a look at the geography from the text is an interesting aside for our Bible study. You may also want to read the parallel accounts in Matthew and John to compare the details (cf., Mt 14:22-32; Jn 6:15-21). You may also want to refer to the map provided here (source: <https://bibleatlas.org/area/bethsaida.jpg>). In Matthew's account Peter also walks on the water.
 - b. The traditional site of the Feeding of the 5000 is at Tabgha on a hillside on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee between Gennesaret and Capernaum.



- c. Jesus sent His disciples back to the shore of the Sea Galilee (Mk 6:45) where they had left their boat (Mk 6:32). The disciples then rowed most likely east-northeast toward Bethsaida where Jesus had told them to go (Mk 6:45).
- d. During the night the disciples encountered strong winds (cf., Mk 6:48), most likely from the east, that impeded their rowing progress. Somewhere out on the Sea of Galilee between Tabgha and Bethsaida, after rowing with difficulty through the night, they encountered Jesus walking on the water (Mk 6:48).
- e. Apparently the winds had blown so hard during the night that the boat was pushed back west-southwest, and they landed at the plain of Gennesaret (Mk 6:53), a little south of their starting point.
- f. This view is my best attempt to understand the geography of the situation. Other solutions are possible. Blessings as you study and decide for yourself. Again, this study is interesting but not critical to our understanding of the text.

B. A Ghost in the Stormy Night (47-52)

1. “Later in the night” Jesus was still on the mountainside praying and His disciples were in “the middle of the lake” (47).
2. The disciples were “straining at the oars” due to the wind being against them. (48)
 - a. I speculate that Jesus knew His disciples were in distress but not in eminent danger as they had been in their earlier stormy encounter on the Sea (cf., Mk 4:35-41).
 - b. Jesus, good to His promise, and most likely with compassion in His heart for His struggling disciples “Shortly before dawn . . . went out to them, walking on the lake” (48).
3. The text says that Jesus was “about to pass by them” (48). Certainly, Jesus was not going to go by them and leave them on the stormy Sea. He was aware of their presence, but He wanted His disciples to be aware not only of His presence but also who He was.
 - a. In spite of His teaching and His miracles, the disciples still did not understand who Jesus was—God in flesh, the Savior sent from God.
 - b. Mark indicated earlier, in the words of Jesus, that they lacked understanding of Jesus’ parables (cf., Mk 4:13).
 - c. In this section of Mark we have considered how the people, the Jewish leaders, and even Jesus’ own disciples failed to understand who He was.
 - d. Warren Wiersbe notes, “One of the central themes in this section of Mark’s gospel is the unbelief of people who came into contact with God’s Servant. All of these people had every reason to trust Jesus Christ, yet all of them failed to do so, including His own disciples!” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 73)
4. Not even thinking that the figure on the water could be Jesus, the disciples assumed that what they are seeing is a “ghost” (Gk., *phantasma* – “a vision or image” – This word is the source of our English word phantom).
5. All of them saw Jesus, this “ghost,” and cried out as they “were terrified” (Gk., *etarachthesan*).
6. But Jesus spoke to them “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (50).
 - a. Jesus spoke these words of comfort “Immediately” (Gk., *euthus*) upon the disciples’ recognition of His presence even though they did not yet know who He was.
 - b. “Take courage” – (Gk., *tharseite*) – This is an antonym of terrified. Instead of being terrified by Jesus’ presence, the disciples should be encouraged. Their Savior is here!
 - c. “It is I” (Gk., *ego eimi*) – These are the same words that can be translated “I am.” Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the “I am” which was the same as claiming to be God, whose name the Jews knew to be *Yahweh*, which in Hebrew means “I am.”
 - d. “Don’t be afraid” (Gk., *me phobeisthe*) – This is a classic word of salvation. Not only was Jesus with His disciples but He would save them from the storm. They had nothing to fear from Him and everything to gain with Him.
7. At this point, Mark omits an important part of the story recorded by John. Wiersbe notes, “At this point, Peter asked Jesus to let him walk on the water . . . Tradition says that Mark wrote as Peter’s spokesman, so perhaps Peter was reticent to include this experience lest it give people the wrong impression. It is easy to criticize Peter for sinking—but have you ever gotten out of the boat yourself?” (Wiersbe, 83)

8. Jesus “climbed into the boat with them” (51).
 - a. As before (Mk 4:35-41), the presence and words of Jesus calmed the storm and the disciples.
 - b. The disciples were “completely amazed” (Gk., *en eautois eksistanto*) – lit. “in themselves standing outside”). For them, it was like watching these events happen to someone else. They were so ecstatic and overwhelmed that they couldn’t believe nor fully comprehend what had just happened. They stood with their mouths open in astonished disbelief over what they had seen and experienced.
 - c. Why were they so amazed at this miracle of Jesus—“. . . for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened” (52).
 - d. Wiersbe comments, “The disciples had failed their test because they lacked spiritual insight and receptive hearts. The miracle of the loaves and fishes had made no lasting impression on them. . . . Even a disciple of Jesus Christ can develop a hard heart if he fails to respond to the spiritual lessons that must be learned in the course of life and ministry” (Wiersbe, 83).

C. Back to Work (53-56)

1. We know the location of the plain of “Gennesaret” where Jesus and His disciples landed. (53)
 - a. The phrase “When they had crossed over (Gk., *diaperasantes*)” in our English translations appears problematic for my thoughts about geography earlier.
 - b. This Greek word is only used here in Mk 6:53 and in Mt 14:34 in Matthew’s parallel account of this miracle. It refers to a transit of the lake either N/S or E/W, but it could simply mean when their journey was completed.
 - c. In John’s Gospel Jesus does not give the disciples a destination, and they set off “across the lake for Capernaum” (Jn 6:17). John simply says at the end of this miracle story that “. . . and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading,” which was in John’s gospel “Capernaum.”
 - d. There are small problems that arise in harmonizing some of the details recorded in the Gospels. However, all three accounts of these events, which come from different viewpoints, agree on the most important message of this passage which is that Jesus is the miracle-working son of God who was not clearly recognized by even His own disciples whose hearts were hardened in disbelief at this point in their journey with Jesus.
2. As we have seen in the past, Jesus’ arrival drew a crowd.
 - a. Word spread “throughout that whole region” on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.
 - b. Soon, people carried the sick to Jesus just as they had from the beginning of His ministry (cf., Mk 1:32ff. 2:1ff).
 - c. Jesus couldn’t go anywhere without attracting a large crowd of sick and needy people.
 - d. “They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed” (56b). This is an echo of the healing of the woman with an issue of blood in Mk 5:24-34.
 - e. They came for physical healing, and Jesus with much compassion healed them. His desire was for them to also come to Him for spiritual healing by welcoming the kingdom of God with repentance and faith (cf., Mk 1:15).

D. Reflections

1. Jesus never sends us away empty. He provides spiritual food through His Word and by His Spirit. Will we take and eat or leave it as leftovers in the basket?
2. Do you really know who Jesus is? If not, wake up, believe, commit, and follow Him as Lord and Savior.
3. Jesus knows when you are in trouble and comes to you in your time of need. Don’t be surprised when He shows up in unexpected ways.
4. Take courage, if Jesus is for you then you are safe no matter what happens.
5. Don’t let your heart be hard to the Word and wonders of God. See, believe, and praise God for all that He is and does in your life. Tell others the good news.
6. Bring others to Jesus. He cares and will minister to them as well. Sometimes He ministers to them through you.
7. We keep working in Jesus’ name and power until He returns. Be aware of and engaged in meeting the needs of all those persons whom God sends your way.
8. Do we come to Jesus with only our wants? How much better it is for us to ask Jesus to give us not what we want but what He knows that we need. Receive what Jesus gives with joy. We may not want what He sends, but we need it because Jesus knows our needs and always sends us what is best.