

## SERMON FOR JULY 25 AND 28, 2021

Pent 9B Mark 6:45-56; Ephesians 3:14-21 “The God who is Able.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, in this morning’s epistle lesson, Paul states, “**Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.**”

St. Paul *wrote* those words to the Ephesians, but they are He *proclaimed* today to you. So that they then, and you today, might know: **our God is the God who is able.**

Able to create all things with only His Word.

Able to send great floods to cover the earth and then able to make those same waters recede. Able to create many nations from an old man and a barren woman.

Able to use men bent on sin to nevertheless accomplish His gracious will. Able to defeat giants and crumble the walls of cities.

Able to raise up shepherds to be prophets and kings.

Able to feed a multitude of people in the desert with manna, and feed thousands with only five loaves of bread and two fish.

Able to cleanse lepers. Able to give eyes to the blind and ears to the deaf. Able to give legs to the crippled and life to the dead. He is the God who is able. Who is able of doing more than we could ask or imagine for you and yours.

Paul wants you to know that, and believe it. Do you believe that? That God is able?

Then why is it that we so often don’t live like it?

Why don’t we act like it when adversity strikes, when life is giving us nothing but lemons and ominous storm clouds appear on the horizon? Why are we surprised when God intervenes?

When we give into despair, we are in effect saying that God is *not* able. Not able to fix my marriage. Not able to help my friend. Not able to give me hope. Not able to provide what I need. Not able to rescue. God is *not* able.

Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, ***if it’s going to be its up to me.*** It doesn’t take long for that attitude to become a heavy weight to bear. It’s like the disciples on the lake from our Gospel lesson, vainly trying to make headway against a mighty wind.

Do you ever feel that way? That all your efforts are getting you nowhere and the storm’s just going to win anyway? In effect, you’re saying that God is not able or unwilling to help.

Repent of your disbelief and consider what happened to the disciples in our Gospel text. The disciples were fallen human beings just like you and I. They often betrayed a lack of understanding. At times they were hard- hearted; they were often frightened and confused.

But then ***Jesus happened to them!*** Jesus, who they ***thought was a ghost***. Jesus, who Mark says ***meant to pass them by***, but who in compassion could not, came to them who had no hope without Him.

Not because they asked for help, because they didn't.

Rather, he came to reassure them and us of God's love and to give his life for all. And so, he spoke to them and said, ***"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."***

When Mark says: ***"he spoke to them and said"*** he is not being repetitious, but is actually using two different verbs for speaking. The first ("he spoke") is used for the proclamation of God's Word, the second ("and said") is for human speech.

And so, from a human mouth and human lips comes a divine and living Word; living Words which always does what it says.

The same divine and living Word that spoke in creation, that gave the stormy seas their boundaries, now speaks into the ears and hearts of his frightened disciples.

To create in them what was not there before: Faith. They can ***"take heart"*** and ***"no longer be afraid"*** because, Jesus says: ***"It is I."***

Now, again, the English translation fails to convey the full impact of Jesus' words. In Greek, what Jesus says is: ego eimi, ***I AM***. I AM is the Divine Name of the Old Testament.

The name so holy it was not uttered by human lips except by the High Priest on the day of atonement. I AM is the name revealed to Moses when he asked what God's name was.

This name tells us that God is unchangeable - ***He is never an I WAS or an I WILL BE, He is always the great I AM.***

Or as the author of Hebrews was inspired to write, Jesus is the ***same yesterday, today, and forever.***

Putting that all together, Jesus comes to them in the midst of their life crises, just as he comes to you in your life crises and says: ***Take heart; I am the Almighty and I am with you.***

***Take heart, for I have overcome the world; you no longer have to be afraid.***

And to prove that point, when He gets into the boat with them, the windstorm ceases, ***for He is the God who is able.***

The good news for you this morning is that our Savior does not give up on us - even if, at times, we, mired in doubt and turned inward by sin, give up on Him.

Our Savior is the eternal unchangeable God and does not change His mind. Our Savior who said to you in Holy Baptism, ***"You are mine"***- and since His word always accomplishes what it states, so you are declared to be His beloved child.

Our Savior, who still today speaks divine words through human mouths; words that give faith. Words that forgive. Words that give us what we truly need.

In scripture, the sea represents chaos and rebellion, and both here and in Revelation, God tames the sea.

Such a savior can calm the chaos caused by sickness, economic hardship or any other storms that arise in your life.

For He is the God who is able **for you**. *Not* absent in the storms; *not* passing you by; *not* a ghost. But the ever present God is in the boat or in the hospital room *with* you.

God in human flesh, *for* you. To keep us going when it all seems too much for us. To lift us up and calm the storms of life even when there seems to be no hope. To speak His Word of forgiveness even when our sins seem too great.

When we take our eyes of faith off of the God who is able, and look to ourselves then that the storms are too great, too powerful for us.

**But *not* for the God who is able!** And so He comes to us that our eyes and our faith be focused on Him.

On Him for whom nothing is too great, too powerful, too overwhelming. On Him who was born of a virgin's womb.

On Him who successfully overcame the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. On Him who was hated and scorned by many yet returned only love and compassion.

On Him who died your death on the cross to pay the wages of your sin only to burst the bonds of death and the grave three days later.

On Him who descended into hell, storming its gates and declaring His victory over all His, and our, enemies.

On Him who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, to pave the way for you.

Do you really believe that such a God can't overcome what is bearing upon you who are heavily laden and give you rest? Oh, ye of little faith! Did He not promise that **I am with you always, even to the end of the age?**

Is He not able? Of course not. **Take heart!** He is with you as He promised. With His Word, with His mighty forgiveness, with His victory, with His flesh and blood.

Perhaps there are times when it seems as if He is not, or like the apostles on the lake that day, that He is passing you by.

But faith clings not to what seems to be, but to the Word and promise of Him who is able - and not only able but who keeps every Word and promise.

## **PAUSE**

Please note what happens next in today's Gospel lesson. People, Mark says, come flocking to Jesus believing they'd be healed if they even touch the hem of His garment.

But did the people come to Jesus, ***or had Jesus come to them, so*** that they might be made whole again?

And has not the God who is able, come into our flesh and blood, to do this very thing? Come to us that we may be saved?

And so, He has come here this day, ***to you and me, and for you and me.***

Clothed not in garments, but clothed in bread and wine, that our hungry souls and sin-parched mouths may feed on Him and touch Him and be healed.

Healed of our sins. Healed of our doubts and fears. Healed of our death that we may live.

When you take a look around at the crowd gathered here this morning, it doesn't take much imagination to see a crowd like those on the shore of Lake Gennesaret - people tired and sick and hurting, struggling and in need of help.

People who *look* defeated by the troubles of life. But we are *not* defeated!

Because we are not alone. Because the God who is able is with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

He comes to us with His life-giving cross, His death defying resurrection, and with His forgiveness, life, and salvation that we receive by grace through faith.

We live in a fallen world and under the shadow of the cross. At times we have to take up our cross and follow Him, enduring pain and suffering, but in the end, we'll share in His victory.

And so however that cross manifests itself in your life, whatever adversity you're facing, you are *not* defeated; but are following Jesus on the path to ultimate victory and eternal life.

And so however the cross manifests itself in your life, know that you are not alone. Not alone facing the stormy seas.

Not alone facing the trials and struggles. Never alone. The One who IS is with you. The great I AM is with you.

The changeless One who is able to create, able to keep, able to save. He will not pass you by. For you are His.

And though your road in life may be rough and the storms confronting you seem huge now, know this: ***He is the God who is able . . . able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [therefore] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.***