

Do Not Be Afraid

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[0 : 00] It's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace. And no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us.

In his word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection.

And we're continuing to ask our two questions. Question one, who is Jesus? Question two, how do we respond to him? And you'll remember these are questions, not that we've imposed from the outside on the text, but these are actually questions that we bring from the inside out of the text.

These are questions that appear multiple times throughout the Gospel. This morning, as we come to Mark chapter 6, I want you to think about this.

[1 : 10] What do we miss out on if we don't get who Jesus is? What do we lose if we can't answer these questions correctly?

And I ask that because in this story that we're going to read, the disciples miss who Jesus is and we get to see the fallout from it.

If you don't believe, if you don't consider yourself a Christian, if you have questions or doubts or objections to Christianity, why should you want the Gospel to be true?

Why should you want the story of Mark to be an actual historical account, what we claim that it is? Why is it so important to know who Jesus is?

What do we miss out on if we miss him? Here in this story, Jesus is going to rebuke the disciples for failing to understand who he is.

[2 : 07] God doesn't want us to miss out, which is why we're going to turn now to his word. And so I invite you to turn with me to Mark 6, starting at verse 45. You can turn in your Bibles.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God has told us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now Mark 6, starting at verse 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.

And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass them by. 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.

[3 : 20] But immediately he spoke to them and said, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Verse 53. When they had crossed over, they came to the 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. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you are our good shepherd and that like a good shepherd, you feed us.

and guide us and protect us. We ask simply that you would do that this morning by your word. That you would show us our need for you, that you'd challenge us, and you would show us how you meet us and you supply for us in that need, that you would encourage us.

[4 : 41] Most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus, that you would grow our love and our affection, our reverence and our awe for him. And we ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. When I came in this morning, thanks to the snow, one of you wished me a Merry Christmas, which is timely because I want you to think back to one of the greatest Christmas movies of all time.

came out in 1990, and Home Alone tells the story of Kevin McAllister, who's eight years old. He's living with his parents in Chicago, and the family accidentally leaves him behind on their Christmas trip to Paris.

Now, we have two problems. It's not just the fact that this eight-year-old has been left alone by himself to fend during the holidays, to feed himself, to make sure everything goes well in the house, but there's a second problem.

There is also a threat to the neighborhood. If you're familiar with the movie, you know that there's two burglars who are casing that entire block, all of the houses.

[5 : 52] I think it's five houses in a row, but they consider Kevin's house to be the most important of all. His house is the prize jewel of all the houses that they want to rob.

Now, Kevin's very clever. We know that he sets up many traps for these burglars, but at the end of the day, Kevin is actually not clever enough. No matter the traps he sets up, no matter the ways he damages and hurts these burglars with irons and nails, and tar, old man Marley has to come to the rescue at the end.

I bring this up because I believe faith in this world, in this life, often feels and seems a lot like home alone. We know God exists.

We believe in him, but at times, maybe it feels like he's forgotten us. At times, maybe it feels like God has left for Paris for right now, and it's up to us to figure out things while he's gone.

If we're lucky enough, maybe he'll come back at some point. Jesus is busy. He's busy with exciting and important things. Maybe at some point, he'll remember us, but until then, we're all alone in this world, and we have to fend for ourselves.

[7 : 16] There's wild threats out there. There's people who are trying to harm us. There's evil forces, and there's no one to protect us. So Jesus exists. He's just not with us.

Wouldn't it be great if we could be like the disciples who actually got to touch and see and talk to Jesus? There's a lot going on in this story, but that is the essential problem that we come up against.

I want you to look with me in verse 47, which summarizes the issue of this passage. When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

The disciples have the same problem that Kevin has. One, they are separated from Jesus. Two, they are in trouble. Verse 48 tells us, he saw that they were making headway painfully.

The Greek actually literally says they were rowing in a way that was torturing them. They were probably losing their ability to keep rowing because their muscles were wearing out.

[8 : 21] The rowing was a torture to them because they were fighting against the wind, making no progress. The last time we saw Jesus and his disciples dealing with a problem on a boat, it was Mark chapter four, and you'll remember that Jesus had fallen asleep.

That seems like a high-class problem now. If only Jesus were in the boat asleep, that would make things so much simpler. Of course, the disciples are in this problem, verses 45 and 46, because we've just finished the story of the feeding of the 5,000, and Jesus says, look, I want you to go on ahead of me while I finish up what I'm doing here.

And then Jesus goes off to pray. Now, there's many theories about why Jesus chooses to send them off first, what he's doing by going and praying. Does he feel some sort of political threat that's surrounding him?

Does he do this because he just needs some alone time? We don't know. Passage does not tell us explicitly. What we do know is this.

Jesus stayed behind. He sent the disciples ahead. And so regardless of Jesus' reasoning here, which is not shared with us, I don't want us to get distracted from the main point of this problem, which is that there's a separation and there's a threat.

[9 : 38] Jesus is praying while the disciples are rowing and failing. There's a problem. Jesus is not there to help.

Or at least so it seems. And yet Jesus, verse 48, sees that they were making headway painfully. Some people think that Jesus had supernatural sight here to be able to look out onto the middle of the sea in the dark of night and notice the disciples.

Other folks think that there was a full moon and so it was illuminated and it would have been easy for Jesus to spot them. Regardless, Jesus' eyes are on his disciples.

Jesus has not forgotten them. Even more than that, same verse 48, between 3 and 6 a.m. in the morning, that's the fourth watch, Jesus starts walking on the sea.

In home alone, Kevin's parents forget about him completely because they sleep through their alarm. On the plane, his mother and his father discuss the fact that they feel like they've forgotten something, they just can't remember what it is until the father remembers that the problem is that they left the garage door open.

[10 : 59] That was their great misstep. Everything else is okay. Kevin's at home because his parents forgot him.

Jesus' disciples are on the sea because Jesus sent them there. Jesus doesn't get distracted. Jesus doesn't clock out.

Jesus has not forgotten them. Jesus' eyes are on his disciples.

Brothers and sisters, no matter what is going on in this world or in your life, Jesus' eyes are on you. No matter how distant he may feel, no matter how chaotic things may seem, Jesus does not forget his people.

No matter the geographic separation, Jesus is still there. Kevin is at home because of a mistake. The disciples are at sea because of Jesus' plan.

[12 : 18] We might even go so far as to say his providence. Jesus is the one who told them to go out on the sea. Proverbs 16 verse 9 tells us this, the heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

And that reminds us, more than just Jesus' character, more than just his heart and his compassion for his people, more than the fact that his memory is better than that of a mother, he also has the power to back it up.

Remember Mark chapter 4, we saw that it is God who calms the sea. And so when Jesus does that, it's meant to show us his divine nature. Now it's not as explicit or dramatic in this passage because the storm doesn't seem to be as bad.

And yet we see the same words repeated in verse 51 that we saw in chapter 4, which is that the wind ceased. And we see here indications of Jesus' divinity, the fact that he is God, that did not appear in Mark chapter 4.

Verse 48, Jesus is doing this casual, easy thing of walking on water. Well, if you're familiar with the Old Testament, this idea of walking on water is something that's attributed to God.

[13 : 37] In Job chapter 9, we're told he tramples on the waves of the sea. Throughout the Old Testament, we're told about God's control over nature in books like Isaiah and Exodus and Joshua.

So again, like in chapter 4, he calms the storm like God would. He walks on the seas as only God can. Then, in case it's not obvious enough, in verse 50, what does he say to his disciples?

It is I. This might seem like a small comment just to explain to them, hey, it's Jesus, not someone else. And yet in the Greek, there's a redundancy because the verb would be enough just to say I am, but actually, literally here, it's I, I am.

It's the same phrase that Jesus used in John chapter 8 when he was talking to the Pharisees. And as soon as he said it, the Pharisees tried to stone him.

Why? Because they knew that Jesus was quoting Exodus chapter 3, verse 14, where God reveals his name to Moses and says, tell the people of Israel, my name is I am.

[14 : 49] And this same title for God appears throughout the book of Isaiah. In other words, Jesus is telling these disciples in the midst of their fear and confusion and separation, I am what I appear to be in this moment.

Not only do I have control over nature, not only am I able to walk on water, I am the God of the Old Testament. I am divine.

To hammer it home even more, verse 48, I told you about this when we read our Old Testament reading from Exodus 33, we're told that he was going to pass by them.

Just like I am, this is a code word from the Old Testament that's assigned with God revealing his presence to his people. In other words, Jesus here in the New Testament is showing and revealing God's characteristics and actions and name from the Old Testament.

Jesus is making it as clear as possible you are not just dealing with a man, you are dealing with God. Who is Jesus?

[16 : 04] Jesus is the one whose eyes are always on his people. Jesus is the one who, when his disciples are afraid, does not lose sight of them, does not lose track of them.

Jesus is the one who sees you. He is the one who does not lose sight of you or lose track of you. Jesus is also God himself.

And so we see in this passage another repetition of what we've been told over and over in this gospel. Another data point of Jesus' divinity.

Another reminder that Jesus is not just man, but also God. And if it feels like we're just saying the same thing over and over, yes, that's the point.

There's an ancient phrase that says, repetition is the mother of memory. Mark is repeating these things over and over for us.

[17 : 04] Jesus is showing them over and over so that it would be driven deep into our hearts that Jesus is the one who cares and Jesus is the one with great power.

And those two things are important, by the way, because we can find other people who care. Maybe not care as much as Jesus does, but there are caring people in this world, right? There is no one who comes close to Jesus' care.

There's also no one who comes close to his power. If you remember from Home Alone, once Kevin's mom figures out that he's missing, she confronts the airlines and she tells them, I'm at a point where I will do anything to get back to my son, including selling my soul to Satan.

And then she has to catch a ride with a polka band because she's not very powerful. Jesus walks on water.

Jesus is the one who sees. Jesus is the one who has the power to act.

[18 : 18] And so how do we respond to him? Well, the disciples here give us a negative example, as they often do. We find out in verse 50, they are terrified and afraid because Jesus has to tell them, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

And then we're told later on, verse 52, why it is that they're terrified and filled with fear. They did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Now, their problem here is not amnesia. It's not that they forgot about the fact that Jesus fed the 5,000. No, they were there for that. They were present for that historical event.

The disciples saw it happen with their own eyes. The problem is that they did not understand it. It did not cause them to see Jesus for who he truly was. The problem of the disciples is that they still seem to believe they're humans with another human.

And if they are sensing Jesus' divinity at some point, they are missing what it was that he went out of his way to teach in the previous story, which is that he is the good shepherd.

[19 : 34] The loaves, in other words, should have made them realize with clarity and conviction that Jesus was the God who cares. He was the good shepherd who feeds his sheep even more than they need.

He's the good shepherd who teaches his sheep everything they need to know to make it in this world. Instead, though, the disciples fail to grasp Jesus and his care and his power and his nature, and so they cannot draw confidence from his character.

They cannot draw confidence from the ways that Jesus has cared for them in the past. For us, then, the hope is that we would do the opposite, that we would not give in and be taken by the hardness of heart that consumes the disciples, that we would be able to see and know and recognize Jesus for who he is in this world, that we would be able to connect the dots in our lives and see the ways that God has cared for us and protected us in the past, that that would cause us to see and realize that Jesus is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep, that we are not helpless, battled around by fate, but instead, God is the one who cares for us and provides for us.

The goal is that we would be able to live out 1 Peter 5, verse 7, which tells us, cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. How do we respond to Jesus?

We avoid the hardness of heart of the disciples and we run to him and see him and trust him as our good shepherd. Now there's an unlearning process for all of this.

[21 : 25] It's easy for me to say here to you this morning, you need to let Jesus be the one who's in control and in charge. You need to have the rest and trust that comes from realizing that he cares for you and he's more powerful than anyone or anything else.

And yet the path of discipleship is long and hard. There is an unlearning process that happens as we follow Jesus together.

Some of us grew up in households where we were expected to function as adults when we were still children. Others of us learn that success and power come along with being in control.

And still others of us know that we're not in control, but we assume that we need to be. And so we're filled with this chronic anxiety and fear.

Our experience is much like the disciples separated, unable to see Jesus. We believe it's up to us to figure everything out. And so it only makes sense that we would be terrified and afraid.

[22 : 50] By the way, fear is an appropriate response if you're home alone and God is not on your side.

Fear is an appropriate response if you're home alone and God is not on your side. It's easy to think of home alone. It's Kevin doing all these things to the robbers and forget the fear that he expresses multiple times.

At the very beginning, when he first encounters them, he goes under the bed and is literally shaking. Later, when he encounters them, he runs back to the bed and hides under the covers.

When he looks out his window and he overhears the burglars talking about the fact that they're going to hit his house once and for all at 9 p.m. that night, what does Kevin say? Mom, when are you coming home?

Of course he's filled with fear. Money, fame, power, and health are not as powerful as you want and they will not accomplish as much as you hope.

[23 : 58] It is great and wonderful to do everything and be in control of everything until you have to do everything and be in control of everything. And you're not powerful enough.

Autonomy is slavery. It is not the way of the cross. The way of the cross is relying on, looking to, and trusting the good shepherd no matter what comes in this life, knowing that he is the one who will protect and provide.

No matter who you are, no matter how powerful you are, how much money you have, how many friends you've accumulated, how large your network is, you are small and powerless in this world.

You are alone in a boat in a storm unless Jesus is there to help, unless the good shepherd is with you.

You need a good shepherd. You have a good shepherd in Jesus.

[25 : 24] And that is what the disciples fail to see and understand. That is the disciples' hardness of heart, that they saw Jesus caring and feeding for these people.

And yet in the next moment, having seen that, they're still filled with fear. Brothers and sisters, you are not home alone because you have a good shepherd.

As you navigate this life, as you determine who to marry and what to do, as you try to figure out how much to save and how to navigate the problems of your health that they present, as you make choices about this job or that job, God has not left you to stumble alone in the dark.

He is, through his word, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. He has not left you alone to be thrown around in the sea by the waves.

Instead, he is the good shepherd who comes to his disciples and tells them not to be afraid. He is the good shepherd who comes to you and tells you not to be afraid.

[26 : 48] Kevin, throughout most of the movie, appears to be alone. And yet we find out at the end that he isn't. Because while most of the families on the block are gone for Christmas, there is one person who is left.

Old man Marley has been keeping watch over him this whole time. Kevin's attempts to rescue and save and protect himself ultimately fail.

And so the burglars hang him up by a coat hook and talk to him about the ways in which they're going to torture him just like he's tortured them. And what happens in that moment?

Kevin's good shepherd shows up. Old man Marley shows up, as the legends tell, with his snow shovel.

Because he's the one who's going to rescue Kevin once and for all. And he does, right? He knocks the criminals out and brings Kevin back to safety.

[27 : 56] How do we respond to Jesus? Know that you have a good shepherd.

Know that he's the one who cares for you and protects you. Avoid the hardness of heart of the disciples. Instead, look to him, embrace him, and trust him.

We see this beautiful, sweet picture in the following verses once they make land. And we have a reminder of who Jesus is. The good shepherd gets right back to work doing what he's been doing throughout the whole Gospel of Mark.

He continues healing the sick. and all these people are running to him. They understand, at least in part, who Jesus is.

He's at work with his disciples. He's at work with the crowds. Jesus is at work with you. I started by asking you a question.

[29 : 07] Why is it so important for us to know who Jesus is? What is it that we miss out on if we don't? It is important for us to know who Jesus is so that, verse 50, we can take heart and not be afraid.

If we fail to recognize who Jesus is, what we miss out on is the comfort and confidence and providence and care that Jesus provides.

We miss out on knowing that he is our good shepherd. We miss out on the peace and security that comes from knowing he sees us no matter what happens in this world.

Jesus knows that you will be tempted to feel home alone in this world. And so, in John chapter 14, he spoke directly to his disciples about this reality.

Knowing that he was going to leave them, knowing that he was going to be separated from them, much like he was separated from the disciples in this passage, much like physically we're separated from him now, he tells them this, for them to remember when he's gone.

[30 : 22] This is John chapter 14. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. In that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you that you're the good shepherd. In our lives, we ask that you would drive that truth deep into our hearts, that we would live not fearful and scared, but we'd live trusting and confident.

Not because we're in control, but because you're in control. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's stand for our prayer.