

26 July 2009
Pentecost 8

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The God Who is Able”

Text: Mark 6:45-56; Ephesians 3:14-21; Genesis 9:8-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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. He *proclaimed* them today to you. 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 great nations from an old man and a barren woman.

Able to use men bent on sin to nevertheless accomplish great things.

Able to defeat giants and mighty armies and walled cities.

Able to raise up shepherds to be prophets and kings.

Able to feed a multitude of people in the desert with manna, and later 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 for you.

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

Then why don't you live like it? Why don't you act like it when storms come your way? Big storms, powerful storms, mighty storms, havoc-wreaking storms, life-turning-upside-down storms. Why do we think at those times that God is *not* able? That these things are too big for us . . . for Him.

For that is what we are saying when we give up. 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.

That is also what we are saying when we think we have to do it. That God is not able. Or that He is not willing. *If it's going to be its up to me.* Have you heard that little ditty? It doesn't take long for that attitude to crush you. It is a most heavy weight to bear. Like the disciples, trying to make headway against a most powerful wind. Ever feel that way? That all your efforts are getting you nowhere . . . and the storm's just gonna win anyway?

Repent. Repent of your unbelief. Repent and consider what happened to the disciples. The disciples who were Joes and Schmoes just like you and me. Not understanding, hardened of heart, often frightened and confused. Consider not what they did, but rather what happened *to* them. *For Jesus happened to them.* Jesus, who they did not think was with them, but they **thought was ghost** - unreal. Jesus, **who meant to pass them by**, but who in compassion could not, but came to them who without Him had no hope. Not because they asked, because they didn't. But because He knew. And to give life is why He came.

And so ***he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."***

Now, I have to get a little technical on you here, to help you understand exactly what this means. For when Mark says: ***"he spoke to them and said"*** he is not being repetitious, but actually uses two different verbs for speaking there - the first ("he spoke") is used for the proclamation of God's Word, the second ("and said") for human speech. And so from a human mouth and human lips comes a divine and living Word; a divine and living Word which does what it says. The same divine and living Word that spoke in creation, that gave these same seas their boundaries, now speaks into the ears and hearts of frightened disciples. To work in them. To create in them what was not there before.

And what is created by this Word? Faith. They can ***"take heart"*** and ***"no longer be afraid"*** because, Jesus says: ***"it is I."*** Now, here's where I have to get technical again, because that's a lousy translation. What Jesus actually says is: **I AM.** That is the Divine Name of the Old Testament. The name so holy it could not be uttered by human lips. The name told to Moses when he asked what God's name was. The name which tells us that God is unchangeable - He is never an *I WAS* or an *I WILL BE*, He is always **I AM.** Dependable, unchangeable, the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb 13:8)

Or in other words, putting that all together, Jesus comes to them in the midst of life and says: *Take heart, or be of good courage. The God who created the world and these seas and you and all things, is with you, here, in my flesh. You no longer have*

to be afraid. And then, just to prove that point, when He gets into the boat with them, the wind, the storm, ceases. Utterly.

For He is the God who is able.

Our Saviour who is able and does not give up on us - even if, at times and mired in sin, we give up on Him.

Our Saviour who is the eternal, unchangeable God and does not change His mind.

Who said to you in Holy Baptism "You are mine" (Is 43:1) - and so you are.

Our Saviour ***who speaks to us and says***; who speaks, and it is done. Who still today speaks divine words through human mouths. Words that give faith. Words that forgive. Words that give what we need.

For He is the God who is able **for you**. *Not* absent in the storms; *not* passing you by; *not* a ghost - an unreal figment of a disturbed mind. But in the boat *with* you. In human flesh, *for* you.

To keep us going when we are tired and it all seems too much for us.

To lift us up when we are frustrated and there seems to be no hope.

To speak His Word of forgiveness when our sins seem too much.

To comfort us when we are downtrodden and show us *different* feet - not the ones walking all over us, but the feet nailed to the cross for us.

For it is when we take our eyes and our faith off of the God who is able, and place them on ourselves that the storms seem too much for us, too great for us, too powerful for us. Because it's true: they are. Way too much 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 battled the temptations of the devil in the wilderness.

On Him who was hated and scorned yet returned only love and compassion.

On Him who took the sin of the world on Himself, that it be on Him and not on you.

On Him who died your death on the cross that He might burst the bonds of death and the grave.

On Him who descended into hell, storming its gates and declaring His victory.

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

On Him who often looked defeated but was never defeated.

Can He not overcome what is bearing upon you who are heavy laden and give you rest? (Matt 11:28)

Is He not with you - He who said ***I am with you always***? (Matt 28:20) Is He not able?

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 that He is passing you by. Perhaps He is not working for us as we want. But faith clings not to what seems to be and not to what we want, but to the Word and promise of Him who is able - and not only able, but who keeps every Word and promise. That's kind of faith is not easy. But He is able to do what we are unable to do.

For take note of what happens next in the story - people, Mark says, come flocking to Jesus to touch even the hem of His garment. But is that what happened? *Or has Jesus come to them*, that they might touch the hem of His garment? For 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, for you and me*. Clothed not in garments of cloth, 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 in this congregation, it doesn't take much imagination to see a crowd like those on the shore of Lake Gennesaret - people tired and sick and hurting and struggling and much in need of help. People who *look* defeated by the troubles of life and our struggles with them.

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. With His life-giving cross and powerful resurrection, and with His forgiveness, life, and salvation that flow from it. And so however that cross manifests itself in your life, it is *not* defeat, but the path to victory and life. Not *your* path, to be sure! Not the path you would have chosen for yourself. But your Saviour's path. His path for you. The path He trod, and the path He now takes you on, *with Him*.

And so however the cross manifests itself in your life, 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. The One who never changes. The One who is able. Able to create, able to keep, able to save. He will not pass you by. For you are His. And though the way be rough and the storms be 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.***

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.