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Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Business as Usual”

Text: Mark 6:45-56; Ephesians 3:14-21

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

Today’s Gospel seems like déjà vu all over again, doesn’t it?

Just a few weeks ago, we heard of the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee. They were freaking out, Jesus calms the storm for them, and they are astounded.

We’ve also heard stories about the crowds of people that followed Jesus around. Just last week we heard one of those stories, in fact. And as usual, when they find out where Jesus is, they not only come out to Him, but they bring *everybody*! Everybody who needs healing - the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf, the diseased - and Jesus heals them.

But there are a few things in the reading today that are different . . . and probably the chief thing is **Jesus walking on the water**. But not just that. That’s amazing, certainly, in and of itself. But maybe some of its amazingness is tempered a little because of what we heard a few weeks ago - that Jesus was able to command the winds and waves to be quiet and still, and they obeyed Him. So if He can do that . . . then walking on water isn’t that far of a stretch.

Different also today is that the disciples weren’t afraid of the storm they were in. What freaked them out today is that when they saw Jesus, they thought they saw a ghost. *That’s* what terrified them! But whether or not they believed in ghosts and things like that (and I don’t know what they believed), it kind of makes sense to me. People don’t walk on water. People sink in water. At least I do! So when they saw Jesus walking on the water . . . I get their thinking!

As far as the people who came for healing . . . perhaps different for them is that they weren’t begging Jesus to touch their loved ones or heal them - they just wanted to touch the fringe of His garment! But this, too, is understandable, as we recently heard the story of the woman who bled for twelve years and was healed when she reached out and did just that - touched the hem of His garment and was made well. Pretty amazing! And it seems that word had gotten around.

But there is one thing is the reading we heard today that is very different, and honestly, quite odd. And it is this: that when Jesus came to them, walking on the water, about the

fourth watch of the night, ***He meant to pass them by.***

Now, I've heard a lot of explanations about that - maybe you have, too - about what that means; why Jesus was going to do that. And there are many! And some make sense to me, and some don't. And it's really all conjecture, because Mark doesn't tell us *why*. Does He not care? Was He testing their faith? Was He hoping they wouldn't see Him? But the impression I get - not just of this detail, but of this entire story, and this entire story in the context of Mark's whole Gospel - is that **this is just business as usual for Jesus**. That for Him, there is nothing really extraordinary going on here. He's just doing as He has done, and will continue to do. Steadfastly, consistently, faithfully going to the cross for the life of the world. And the life He gives as He goes - the healings, the feedings, the forgiveness, the rescues - are all signs, pointers, to the great, new life He has come to provide for us.

So that day, right after the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples get into the boat to go to the other side. *Business as usual*. Jesus goes off by Himself to pray. *Business as usual*. The storm is calmed by Jesus. *Business as usual*. The crowds follow Jesus and He heals them. *Business as usual*. And even Jesus walking on the water, intending to pass by His disciples and meet them on the other side, *business as usual . . . for Jesus*.

Now, often, business as usual **for us** is freaking out like the disciples. When life throws you a curveball, when the storm clouds gather on the horizon, or when the storms of life *hit* - you lose your job, the stock market crashes, there is a death, or the doctor comes into the room with *that look* on his face - you know, the one that tells you this isn't going to be good news, the wrong party gets elected, causing widespread weeping and gnashing of teeth, a pandemic shuts down the world . . . or even smaller whirlwinds, like a break-up, a promise not kept, a failing grade, being passed over for a promotion, your plans for the future not quite working out as you imagined or hoped . . . and it's *déjà vu* all over again, when we, like the disciples, wonder: *Lord, don't you care? Lord, are you intending to pass us by? Lord, why is this happening? Lord, where's the fringe of Your garment when I need it? Lord, where are you?*

And in the midst of our uncertain world and our uncertain lives, in the midst of our fear and doubt, in the midst of our troubles and trials, there is the Lord. Steadfast, consistent, faithful. The crowds are fed, the storms are stilled, the sick are healed. In the midst of this world and it's *business as usual* of things falling apart and things going wrong and chaos, is Jesus and His *business as usual* of calming, rescuing, and saving. Even when faced with the biggest chaos of all - *going to the cross*.

How calm Jesus is through all of it. He knows what's about to unfold and take place, and there He is washing His disciples' feet and teaching them. He goes off to pray, and then lets Himself be arrested. He doesn't try to defend Himself or protest, but as Isaiah says (53:7), *He is like a lamb led to slaughter and opens not His mouth*. He doesn't ask His Father to send twelve legions of angels to fight for Him, He prays for those who are

persecuting Him. He bows His head and hands over the Spirit, and despite the forsakenness of the cross, entrusts His Spirit to His Father.

And while that's all going on, the disciples are, well, being the disciples! They're freaking out, drawing the sword, running away, denying, mourning, dazed and confused, unbelieving, in chaos.

But then Sunday morning. Easter morning. A resurrection. And . . . a *good* chaos? Soldiers who have abandoned their post, the disciples running not away but to an empty tomb, disbelieving, dazed and confused *with joy*? But for Jesus, *business as usual*. He talks to Mary in the garden as if nothing unusual has happened. He walks and talks with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, matter-of-factly opening the Scriptures to them. He greets His disciples in the locked room like it was any other day: *Peace be with you*. Showing, as He did all along, that He cared. That He *doesn't* pass us by. That everything that happened was according to plan. And that even when He seemed farthest away from us with no chance of His coming back to us - when He lay dead in the grave! - here He is, with us, as He was all along. With us in all the storms and chaos and uncertainty of this world. That no matter what is going on in the world or in your life, there is one thing - *always* one thing - you can count on: **Him**.

I said last week that the disciples were still disciples and still learning. They were still learning about Jesus and *what* He came to do and *all* He came to do. And still learning about Jesus, that day on the Sea they thought they saw a ghost. Jesus' ghost. Passing them by.

Don't mock them. We do it, too. When the storms and chaos and uncertainty hit, it's easy to think Jesus is *ghosting* us, too. You know what ghosting is, right? It's the term used when you're on a video call like Zoom or WebEx and a person logs on and is supposed to be there, but their video isn't on and really they're off doing something else, or at least, not paying attention. They're there, but they're not there.

And we can think that, too. Because is Jesus with us? Well, yes you might say, because Jesus is God and so He is everywhere. True enough. But not very comforting when I need Him here. With me. Like a crying child in the middle of the night - it's not good enough just to know Mom and Dad are in the house. I need them here, now, with me! So yeah, Jesus is everywhere, but is He really *ghosting* me? Off helping someone else?

But as good Lutherans, you know that Jesus is more than just present everywhere, that He is present for us where He has promised to be, which is in His Word and Sacraments. But I read His Word and don't feel Him with me. I take communion and the storms and chaos are still there. And my baptism was so long ago . . . Is Jesus really there for me, or *ghosting* me?

The devil whispers in your ear: *He's ghosting you!* He's not really there. And sometimes,

like those disciples in the boat, we believe it. We think it's only a ghost.

But Jesus was not a ghost that day. That was really Him. There for His disciples as He always was. And really here for you. Don't rely on what you feel or what the devil is trying to trick you into thinking; rely on the witness of His Word. And rely on the empty tomb. And that if the storm and chaos *of death* couldn't keep Jesus from us, no other storm can either.

That's what the apostle Paul came to know - and He had more than his fair share of storms and chaos in his life! So he prays that the Ephesian Christians know this, too. That they be *strengthened with power through the Spirit in their inner being*. That *Christ dwell in their hearts through faith*. That they may *comprehend breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ for them*. And to believe that *He is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think*. Which is to say, that they know the steadfastness, reliability, consistency, and faithfulness of Jesus **for them**.

And that you know it, too. That you know that, as we sang, you can *Entrust Your Days and Burdens to God's Most Loving Hands* (LSB #754). That you know that when you are baptized, that really was Jesus taking you into His death and resurrection, so that you have already begun to live a life that's never going to end. Death can't have you! You've already been raised with Him, in Him. And that you know that when you read or hear His Word, that really is Jesus speaking to you - words of life, word of peace, words of forgiveness. And that you know that here at this altar, this eating and drinking is really and truly His Body and Blood, feeding you with the Bread of Life. Ghosting is what we do! It is NOT what Jesus does. **Where His Name is, there is He.**

And these stories we heard today teach us that. The storms and chaos and uncertainties of life may cause us to freak out in fear, and disbelieve a bit, and wonder . . . But for Jesus, it is *business as usual*. The business of rescuing and saving. The business of forgiveness, life, and salvation. The business of a Saviour here *for you*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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