

Sermon for Zion, November 17, 2019

Hymns: King of Kings / Awesome God; 375 – Fairest Lord Jesus; 371 – Love Divine

Scripture: Luke 8:22-25

Sermon Title: Jesus Revealed

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” (Luke 8:22-25)

Here we are, Gospel of Luke, 8 chapters in, and the disciples, the twelve closest to him, still don’t know who Jesus is. Who Jesus *really* is. You’d think by now they would; just a few verses ago, questioned as to his mission by the followers of John the Baptist, Jesus himself summed up his ministry to this point (Luke 7:22): “*Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.*” You’d think that would be enough. But it wasn’t. The disciples still didn’t know. That is to say, they knew him. But not the whole Him.

But they’re about to. Chapter Nine is right around the corner, the big reveal is coming, and here, this morning, Luke Chapter Eight, the mist begins to clear, the curtain is opening, the realization is beginning to hit. And to help us along, Luke recounts four events, with each of which we – and the disciples - understand a bit more of just who Jesus is.

It all begins with a “furious squall” on the Sea of Galilee, which apparently came up without warning. Jesus was dozing, head on a cushion, rocked to sleep in the stern of the boat. But when a fine day turned bad and when bad turned to worse, there wasn’t a man among them not afraid for their lives. That is, all except one, snoring peacefully away in the windswept arms of the fragile craft.

You can’t knock the disciples for being afraid. A few of them were fishermen, and knew how treacherous this type of thing could be. So when the wind picked up and the waves tossed the boat like a mouse in the paws of a cat, they assumed that the whole sorry affair was going to end up at the bottom of the sea, and that was that. As for Jesus; well, he dozed like a hammocked vacationer, dreaming sunny dreams.

“The disciples woke him,” it says, and you have to wonder how they woke a man who could sleep through this. But wake he did, and was greeted with a scene of chaotic panic.

Twelve disciples clinging with all their strength to the boat, the sails, the ropes, each other. And they cry, *“Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”* Or in Peter’s more accusatory words recorded by Mark (4:38): *“Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*

In response, Luke tells us, Jesus *“got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.”* And for what comes next, I like the King James: *“And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* One moment, they’re afraid of the wind and the waves. Now, they’re afraid, exceedingly afraid, of the man whom the wind and the waves so instantly and dramatically obey. For no man has that power. *“What manner of man is this?”* indeed. Or, in the NIV: *“Who is this?”*

They’re still damp when the next story begins. The boat has pulled up on the shoreline of the land of the Gerasenes, a place distinctly uninviting to Jews such as Jesus and his friends. Not surprising, as the story begins this way:

“Immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.” (Luke 8:26-37; Mark 5:1-20 CEV)

When Jesus pulls up on shore. And we read: *When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!”* For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man.

While the disciples don’t yet fully know just who Jesus is, this thing – these things - inside the man do. *“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”*

The stricken man somehow makes it to Jesus, and falls at his feet, and as he does, Jesus places his good and holy and compassionate and loving hand on the man’s head, and says to – well, to whatever it was that had been torturing him, twisting him, tearing him apart - Jesus says to this thing, these things, *“Come out of this man, you evil spirit.”* And a strange conversation ensues, which I will read to you, but not even try to explain (8:30-33):

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

And the swineherds, we are told, run to town to tell the tale, and the townsfolk stream back, and there's the former stricken man, calm, clothed, serene; and in the distance, the pigs, drowned, washing up to shore. And this is all too much for the townsfolk, who like things to be predictable, and Jesus is anything but predictable, and Luke tells us, *"Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left."* Because like the disciples, they didn't fully understand who Jesus is, and what we don't understand, we fear. But the curtain, the veil, is lifting.

It is back to Capernaum they sail, the disciples keeping a wary eye on the weather, and a crowd has gathered on the shore, and at its head, Jairus, leader of the synagogue, distraught, wringing his hands, falling at Jesus' feet, begging him come, because, Luke tells us, *"his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying."* And now they're on their way into the heart of Capernaum, propelled by the crowd, when Jesus stops (Luke 8:45-46):

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

While everyone was denying it, Peter said, "Master, people are crowding all around and pushing you from every side."

But Jesus answered, "Someone touched me, I felt power going out from me."

And he looks down, and at his feet, a woman, trembling, her face awash with tears. The crowd draws back; the woman looks up, into the face of Jesus. *"I had been ill – bleeding – for twelve years – it would not stop – I thought, if I just touch him, just the edge of his cloak, I know I'll be healed – and I did, I did, and I am, I am."* And Jesus reaches down, and takes her hand, and lifts her to her feet, and he says, *"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."* And she, like the disciples, doesn't quite know who he is, not the whole of him, but it is enough. She is healed. She is whole. She is at peace.

But Jairus is not. For someone has pushed their way through the crowd, having come from the house. *"Your daughter is dead," he said. "It's too late. Don't bother the teacher anymore."*

And with these cruel words something inside Jairus dies too, but before he can give in to grief and despair, Jesus takes hold of him, gives him a shake, looks in his eyes. *"Don't*

be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” Nothing. Again: “*Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.*” And that which had died within Jairus flickers back to life; a dim ray of hope pierces his soul; who is this man? This Jesus?

They arrive at the house to the wailing of mourners. Taking with him Peter, James and John, Jesus makes for the door, where stands the mother, herself a broken picture of grief, the cries of the mourners washing over her in waves of despair. Jesus turns, and in a loud voice, says to the crowd, “*Stop wailing. She is not dead. She only sleeps.*” But the mourners do not know who Jesus is. “*They laugh,*” says Luke, “*knowing the girl is dead.*” They know death when they see it. But they don’t know who Jesus is. They laugh, the bitter laughter of those who know there is no hope. For they don’t know who Jesus is.

Father, mother, enter the darkened room, Jesus holding their hands. The light of an oil lamp plays on a still, white face. Jesus takes her small, cold hand in his own. “*Talitha, coum,*” he says, as though waking her from a nap; “*my child, get up.*” And, Luke tells us, “*Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up.*” And she looks at her speechless mother, her astonished father; and she looks at Jesus. And she, having died and been raised to life, knows him. Somehow, knows just who he is.

As do we, now, a bit. A bit more. For Luke has, in these stories, in recounting these four events, shown us a Jesus who has power over the natural world, in the wind and the waves; over the unseen spiritual world, in the man with the demons; over the physical world, in the woman who was healed; over the power of death itself, in the smiling face of a twelve year old girl.

And we wonder how they didn’t know, how they didn’t realise, just who Jesus was, given all they had seen and heard. And I wonder how we don’t either.

Because unlike them, the disciples of Chapter Eight, we have the whole story. The whole Gospel of Luke. And of Matthew, and Mark, and John. We have the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection. We have the miracles, the parables, the impact of it all. We have the accounts of the transformations of simple men and women into people filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, a force of faith which would change the world. We have the two thousand year sweep of history itself, a history which recounts the inexplicable, inexorable march of the Christian faith from a backwater Galilee fishing town to the furthest corners of the earth.

We have it all. And do we realise – do we fully realise – just who Jesus is? Who it is who invites us, calls us, to follow? That he is no less than the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God? May God open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, our minds. May we see and understand who Jesus is, and in understanding, live for him who died for us and rose again – live for Him, and follow, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Amen.