

Pastor Christa von Zychlin  
 Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
 Hartland, WI 53029  
 Preached July 30, 2006 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
 +++

Mark 6:48 *Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.*

### Straining at the Oars

Pushing, they were. And getting nowhere for their efforts.  
 Some of you have been there, sometime in the past few weeks, haven't you?

**Story I:** Jim works with a client named Joe for five years. Five years, a big account – he's worked out a special plan to cover Joe's exact specifications for his company. Every company's a little different, you know, it takes time to work out the details, time to work out a good solid business relationship. Jim's taken Joe out for lunch, they've gone golfing together, he knows the name of the Joe's dog, for heaven's sake, and now Joe has gone over to the competitor. Signed a contract with the up & coming company across the state. Happens all the time, and Jim shrugs it off, "Well, you should go where you feel like you're getting the best deal," Jim tells Joe, ever the upbeat sales rep. "That's business." But really, Joe feels like he's gotten slugged in the belly. The wind knocked out of him. Ugh.

*Jesus saw Jim, straining at the oars, because the wind was against him.*

Some of you have been there, sometime in the past few weeks, haven't you?

**Story II** Mary's kid is a 6<sup>th</sup> year junior in college, having changed colleges once, and changed college majors four maybe five times. Mary is losing count. Mary's *friends'* kids are graduating and off to law school or new lucrative engineering jobs or one's even getting married to some great East Coast genius, and last week Mary's kid got picked up DUI. And she's paid for his school and she's paid for his tutoring and she's paid for his counseling and she's written him long carefully parsed letters... trying to say not too much, not too little either... and nothing seems to have made any difference.

*Jesus saw Mary, straining at the oars, because the wind was against her.*

Pushing, and getting nowhere for all her efforts.

**Story III** Jason's MRI results came back this week. It was supposed to be good news, because there didn't seem to be a tumor and there weren't any other signs of abnormality, but it means that yet another set of doctors and another kind of clinic was at a dead end as far as what to do about chronic headaches in a seemingly healthy 26 year old. There was talk of depression, and of fibromyalgia, and of anxiety management, but no clear, distinct diagnosis, therefore no distinct roadmap for relief. His girlfriend is finding other things to do on Saturday nights, and his boss is hinting that Jason might be better off in a less "stressful" work environment and his basketball buddies stopped calling him a long time ago. And Jason isn't about to give up on himself, but how long can he continue to be hopeful about the future?

*Jesus saw Jason, straining at the oars, because the wind was against him.*

**In the News** The people of the Christian Church of Lebanon... have spent time on their knees in prayer this past week. Fishermen look at the beaches black with oil from a power station blasted by Israel; Rescue workers are digging through the rubble of bombed houses, looking for bodies, ... and one Christian source says the Hezbollah have specifically come into their neighborhood to send their missiles into Israel, inviting a retaliation into family homes. "God make the hatred cease," the church prays. God don't let our children be killed by Israeli missiles pray the Lebanese. God don't let our children be killed by Hezbollah rockets, pray the Israelis. A photo on the internet shows a mother looking at her 16 year old son lying on a hospital bed... mercifully he's alive, but his pale young body looks like someone poured pepper & ketchup on him. It's not pepper and ketchup. Of course. "Give us a cease fire for at least a few days," says the Red Cross, says World Vision, says the Roman Catholic Pope, says Lutheran World Relief, say the churches united in mission... "we need at least a few days to get the women & children out, to get emergency food and clean water & medicine in to innocent victims." And the bombs they keep falling.

Sometimes even the church at prayer can feel like it's just pushing, pushing, and getting nowhere.

*And Jesus saw the global Christian Church, straining at the oars because the wind was against them.*

Except for the Lebanese Church, the names I just used are made up names and if they seem to be anything like your story if it seems that I'm in any way preaching to you it's not because I'm using you as an example, it's because it's amazing how often we, people of God, get in the boat of our lives and the sailing is not smooth.

In the disciples case, in Mark chapter 6, it was even Jesus who sent them out onto the seas in the first place. So if you're in a tough situation, it doesn't necessarily mean you did something wrong.

I hope this is good news for you. Just because your client deal went south, your kid is underachieving, your body is messed up, or even, god forbid, you find yourself in a war zone, it does not have to mean you personally did something wrong to be in that predicament. The disciples, you will notice, were just following orders.

That's the good news, it's not necessarily your personal fault that there's trouble.

Here's the bad news: you can do everything "right" in this world and still find yourself in a bad situation. Because the whole world is messed up. It's not just you and me! St. Paul says that all of creation groans. And big bad waves on the sea at night are just one example of the sin that affects not just human beings and our decisions and our relationships and our communities, but also the whole created order.

And that's why we need a Savior, a real Savior. Not just a career coach or a family counselor or a great doctor or a couple days ceasefire for the Red Cross trucks to get in. Though we probably will need all of that at sometime too,

But when the winds are against us

What we most need is a Savior. And that's exactly what we and the disciples get.

Mark 6:48 It's about the 4<sup>th</sup> watch of the night... this is between 3 and 6 a.m. while it's still pretty dark... Jesus sees the disciples straining with the wind against them and he goes out to them, walking right on the lake, right towards them. And then, Mark says, he was about to pass by them.

Those words might seem strange to us, but. Mark's Jewish community knew their Old Testament so when they heard this part of the story they immediately would have thought of

Exodus 33 & 34 where The Lord passed by Moses on Mt. Sinai and showed him his glory.

Mark's Jewish community when they heard this story of Jesus walking on water they would have immediately thought of

Isaiah 43:16 *"This is what the Lord says, he who made a way thru the sea, a path through the mighty waters"*.

Mark's Jewish community would immediately have thought of

Job 9:8 *"God alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea."*

Mark's first readers would have known this, but the disciples like us, didn't quickly make that connection.

The disciples, like us, somehow find it easier to believe in ghosts & evil spirits than in an all powerful God... who is hell-bent on saving us. Who will bend the powers of hell and dark winds and crushing waves, in order to climb in our boats to save us.

This is the Gospel: We are never forsaken.

This too is the Gospel: Our God is all powerful, and even in the man Jesus, our God is a presence we cannot control.

Who climbs into our boat not because we invite him, look at the text, Jesus doesn't stand there waiting for an invitation. He just climbs in our boat because he *wants* to calm our fears and stay with us in our troubles.

It is a long standing tradition, one that I like, that the boat is the church.

In obedience to Jesus, you and I get into the boat. We join his church, and use this boat to navigate the seas of our lives, and to carry us to places where we can be of service to others

And sometimes it might seem that this little boat is going nowhere,  
And the skies can be dark, and the seas can be rough.

But then you remember it was Jesus command that you come here, wasn't it?

And then just

when you're straining, and getting no where, then it's time to look up, look for Jesus, watch him get in beside you again, stilling the storms of life

saying: "Take courage It is I, your Savior. There is no reason to be afraid."

Amen.