

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 6:45-56

Year B - Proper 12, Text: Mark 6:45-56
Year B - Proper 12, Text: (John 6:1-21)

In this opening part of this pericope, from Mark 6:45-51, we read of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee and stilling a storm at sea.

Verses 6:45-47: Jesus tells the disciples to get into a boat and precede Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. (We are not told at this point how Jesus Himself planned to get to the other side.) Eventually, Jesus dismisses the crowds — no doubt, those who had participated in the feeding miracle. Jesus then goes up on a mountain and prays alone until evening comes.

Verses 6:48: The disciples, who are now some distance from shore, find their boat being tossed about by turbulent waves, for “the wind was against them.”

Then the text says: “About the fourth watch of the night,” Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. The fourth watch was from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. The Romans divided the twelve hours between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. into four equal parts called “watches.”

Verse 6:49: When the disciples see Jesus walking toward them across the water, they are terrified. They think they are seeing a ghost. (According to 14:1–2, Herod thought of Jesus as perhaps a ghostly apparition of John the Baptist come back to life.) However, Jesus is about to deepen their understanding of who He really is.

Verse 6:50: Jesus exhorts them to be courageous and not be afraid. The Greek words translated as “It is I” in the NRSV are *ego eimi*, “I AM.” This expression of the Divine Name is an awesome formula of self-revelation (see Exodus 3:14). Jesus presents Himself to His disciples as the incarnate and saving presence of the eternal God (Yahweh).

Verses 6:51-52: The story ends with the disciples continued amazement and confusion, hearkening back to their lack of understanding of the miracle that preceded this lesson.

The entire incident conjures up images of the early church suffering torments of persecution and experiencing doubts about the presence and power of the Lord. However, God’s people, who know Jesus as the “I AM,” have cause to rejoice; they have the confidence to know that their cries of “Lord, have mercy!” are always heard and acted on by the Lord of creation, time, and eternity. God may not always do what people desire, but He will always do what is in keeping with His good and gracious will.

In the next section, from Mark 6:53-56, Jesus comes to Gennesaret.

Verse 6:53: The disciples, deflected from their course, put in either south of Capernaum on a plain that Josephus identifies or else at a village called Gennesaret.

Verses 6:54–55: When the group disembarks from the boat, the people there immediately recognize Jesus. They rush around in the nearby region and bring the sick on mats to Jesus so that He might heal them.

Verse 6:56: Wherever Jesus goes (into villages, cities, or farms), people lie sick in the market places and beg Jesus to let them touch the fringes (tassels) of His cloak — and those who do so are healed.

The tassels of Jesus’ cloak are mentioned for the first time here in Mark. The “tassels” are the four fringes on the outer cloak required by Numbers 15:38f and Deuteronomy 22:12. Jesus wore them as an observant Jew, but expressed scorn concerning the elongated tassels worn by the Pharisees to draw attention to themselves (Matthew 23:5).

