

Monday, March 27 – Read Luke 5:1-12. Jesus made Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee’s shoreline, the center of his ministry. It made sense that most of his followers came from that area. But his vision always reached farther than any one location. He asked the first disciples to “push into the deep water,” pointing toward the ultimate task he had for them. “Fishing for people” would push them into the deep waters of a whole world filled with suffering and spiritual hunger. Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher. Peter caught fish for a living. After using Peter’s boat as a moveable pulpit, Jesus startled him by saying, “Row out farther, into the deep water, and drop your nets for a catch” (verse 4). Though this didn’t make sense to Peter, he agreed “because you say so.” What might Jesus be calling you to today that is more than the “usual” or “sensible”? Are you open to saying, “Because you say so, Lord, I’ll do it”? “When Simon Peter saw the catch, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Leave me, Lord, for I’m a sinner!” (verse 8) When did you most vividly realize, “God is god—and I’m not”? Did you feel any fear, as Peter seems to have in this passage? Did you take in Jesus’ reassurance: “Don’t be afraid” (verse 10)? How has realizing who God is, who you are, and who God wants to be in your life changed things for you?

Tuesday, March 28 – Read Matthew 17:24-27. All Jewish men paid a yearly tax for the Temple’s costs (furnishings, special vestments, rituals). Roman emperors and their families, like most monarchs, never paid taxes they levied on others. Jesus had a similar relationship with the Temple—he called it “my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49). As he did with his baptism, Jesus let the “status” point pass (see Philippians 2:5-6). He paid the Temple tax in a way that gave Peter, and later Christians, a valuable model of trust in God’s sustaining power and of good citizenship. When the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, Rome forced Jews to pay the Temple tax anyway—to a pagan temple in Rome! This included the Jewish Christians for whom Matthew probably wrote his gospel. Yet refusing would have caused more cruelty and persecution, with no positive effect on Rome’s attitude. Peter, maybe recalling this story, urged Christians to “honor the Emperor” (see 1 Peter 2:13-17) if they didn’t have to give up their faith in doing so. Does Jesus’ example in paying that tax say anything to us today, in very different conditions? In what parts of life can you live out your Christian convictions and “honor the Emperor”?

Wednesday, March 29 – Read Mark 6:33-52. In Galilee, it was hard for Jesus and his disciples to find privacy. (Though often called a “sea,” the body of water in Galilee is a relatively small lake of about 120 square miles. By contrast, Lake Michigan covers 22,400 square miles.) Jesus caringly used his power to feed a large crowd in a remote place. Even after seeing that, though, the disciples still didn’t seem to think Jesus could help them when the weather on the lake turned against them. Facing a hungry crowd, the disciples said, “Send them away so that they can go...buy something to eat for themselves.” Jesus used the situation to open their eyes to larger realities, saying, “You give them something to eat.” And they saw his power make the impossible possible. God so often works through people, with God’s power enabling them to be and do more than they could otherwise. When have you done this kind of “teaming up” with God? What were the results to others you served, and in you? They’d helped Jesus feed the crowd, yet the disciples were terrified to see him walking on water (verse 50). Despite what they’d seen, their thoughts were limited to the “normalcies” of daily life. Mark said “they hadn’t understood about the loaves” (verse 52). In what parts of your life do you find it hard to trust that God’s power can make any real difference? What keeps you from “understanding about the loaves”?

Thursday, March 30 – Read Matthew 14:22-33. Matthew’s story sounded almost exactly like the one we read in Mark yesterday—until Peter spoke up. He showed that mix of faith and doubt most of us wrestle with at times: “Lord, if it’s you, order me to come to you on the water.” Next thing he knew, he was striding across the water! It worked until he let the wind distract him and his fear took over. “As he began to sink, he shouted, ‘Lord, rescue me!’” And Jesus did. The story starts with a sense of urgency: “Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat” (verse 22). Many scholars believe it was to avoid a move to forcibly declare Jesus a military leader and king (see John 6:15). What issues or situations do you face that require you to take urgent action in order to stay in tune with God’s will for you? When Jesus said, “It’s me”, he was using the same words in Greek as the “I Am,” God’s Old Testament name (see Exodus 3:14). Scholar Myron Augsberger writes that “The primary meaning is that Jesus as Lord of creation can be present in the lives of people in this material world.” In what parts of your life do you need Christ’s comforting, calming presence today? How confident are you that he can and will be with you?

Friday, March 31 – Read Mark 4:35-41. This passage evoked the famous Old Testament story of Jonah (see Jonah 1-2). In each, a storm blew, while the main character slept. But Jonah was running from God, while Jesus slept in peace and trust. When the disciples asked, “Don’t you care that we’re drowning?” (verse 38), Jesus (being God in the flesh) calmed the storm. They were amazed. Only God could calm the sea’s stormy chaos (see Jeremiah 5:22). This miracle further revealed and affirmed Jesus’ identity as Messiah. Think of one major life “storm” you’ve experienced. How did you make it through that experience? Did you have a sense Jesus was “in the boat” with you to guide, comfort, and help bring you peace? How has that experience impacted your relationship with God, and shaped the person you are today? Our world has experienced many “storms” (e.g. the Enterprise tornado, the Haiti earthquake, the tsunami in Japan, Hurricane Katrina, the terrorist attacks of 9/11/01). Have you seen any way that God brought peace, and calm in the midst of such disasters and their aftermath? If so, list ways you’ve seen or still see God at work for good in these situations