

Mark 6: 41-52

⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²And all ate and were filled; ⁴³and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

⁴⁷ When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by. ⁴⁹But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' ⁵¹Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵²for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Commentary: After an incredibly busy day and an awesome miracle, Jesus, the disciples and the crowds all go their separate ways. The crowds go home, the disciples go boating in the sea, and Jesus goes up on a mountain to pray. But then, evening comes, and evening is the time of testing and struggle. The disciples are rowing against a harsh wind and by early morning they are exhausted and frustrated. But suddenly, they see an apparition. Is it a ghost? It looks like Jesus, but can it be? Sure enough it is him, for he speaks to them: 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' As soon as Jesus gets on the boat with them, the wind stops and calm is restored to the sea. But what about within the spirits of the disciples? We read that 'their hearts were hardened.' They were too overwhelmed, frustrated, and closed within to really open up to the calling, the vision and the miracle of love that Jesus is calling them to be part of.

What time of the day do you find yourself feeling frustrated, overwhelmed or shut down? Is it when you wake up and realize we are not in a dream in this season of Covid-19 and you have to brave another day? Is it mid-day when whatever work or tasks you have to do are done, or your project or hobby is not motivating you and you feel boredom, dread or isolated and alone? Is it evening when various demons of self-questioning and doubt rise up to torment you? Is it trying to feel appreciative, kind and loving with those around you but resentment is what emerges more naturally? Is it fear for what lies ahead in your business, work, health, routines or relationship challenge?

Struggle is a part of any life. And inner struggle comes unbidden and often catches us by surprise. The question Jesus confronts us with, though, is this: Will we harden our hearts? Hardening our hearts in a situation or toward someone may give us short term energy, but it's negative energy. It is always the right choice to find our ground again by opening our hearts in trust, trust that love can find us again, in new ways to meet our ever new realities...

Prayer: Give me greater trust in my heart, O God, especially in this season of Covid-19, when I'm thrown off my game all too easily, again and again. Meet me especially in those times of the day, those situations and those concerns where my anxiety, dread or resentment bubbles up and invades my heart and spirit... Clear the darkness in me and fill me with the light of your love... Amen.