

SERMON NOTES

“Questioning the Identity of Jesus”

Luke 8:22-25

This sermon is the third in a series entitled “Walking with the Disciples to Easter.” The series is designed to help worshipers see the life and ministry of Jesus through the eyes of those who knew him best.

Introduction

- Last week, we saw that the disciples faced opposition from the religious authorities of their day.
- That opposition mirrored the uncertainties within the disciples’ own hearts about who Jesus is.
- Confronting these uncertainties was the only way that the disciples were going to understand and trust what God was up to when He sent Jesus into the world. And the same is true of us.

Describing What Happened

- The formula that introduces this story (NIV, “One day”) is an indicator that Luke is beginning a new section of his Gospel—one in which the identity of Jesus will take center stage.
- Luke tells this story as a metaphor for the life of discipleship. Not all miracle stories function in this way, but this one does.
- The story implies that Jesus had a pedagogical purpose for this journey.
- Storms were not unusual on the Sea of Galilee. This lake is more than 700 feet below sea level, and its unusual topography contributes to the development of sudden and violent storms.
- The disciples’ panic, though certainly understandable, stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ calm demeanor. He has complete command of the situation, and he calms the storm with a word.

Jesus’ Question

The message that Luke wants to communicate by telling this story can be found by examining the two questions that the miracle elicits. Jesus asked his disciples the first of these questions.

The Content of the Question

- The question that Jesus asks of his disciples functions as a challenge, but he is not disputing their evaluation of the situation. Luke makes it clear that the boat—and its inhabitants—were in significant danger. Sometimes, a lack of faith leads us to misrepresent our situation, but that is not what happened here.
- Nor is Jesus questioning the competence of his disciples to manage the boat’s affairs. It is likely that four of the men on the boat were fishermen, which means that they had years of experience sailing on this lake.
- What Jesus is questioning is their faith. Luke changes the more complex wording of Mark and Matthew to a simple “Where is your faith?” He was not asking them “In whom is your faith?” Everyone in first century Palestine, at least among its Jewish inhabitants, knew the answer to that question (God). He was asking them either a) Why don’t you

have any faith? Or, b) why is your faith not near to hand when you need it? Both questions are relevant when we face difficult situations.

The Importance of the Question

- The question was important for at least two reasons.
- First, Jesus was about to send the disciples out to minister without him (Luke 9:1-5). They would need faith to preach God's Kingdom, to drive out evil spirits, and to heal diseases.
- Second, this would not be the last time that the disciples faced challenging circumstances. They would need faith to navigate those circumstances.

The Disciples' Question

The disciples also had a question—one that they entertained among themselves. It is the question that stands behind much of Luke's story-telling at least through 9:50

The Content of the Question

The disciples ask themselves "Who is this man?" But what they are really asking is what kind of man can do what Jesus has done.

The Rationale of the question

It makes perfect sense that they would ask such a question. After all, Psalm 107:23-30 makes it clear that only God controls the forces of nature.

The Irony of the Question

- Nevertheless, there is substantial irony in the question. Within the story itself, one wonders what the disciples were expecting when they came to Jesus with the exclamation "We are about to drown."
- Moreover, the irony only intensifies as the section unfolds (Luke 8:26-56). Later in the chapter, the friends of a religious leader thought they knew who Jesus is. They called him "the teacher," even though he had just healed a woman of an illness that she had for years and even though he was about to raise the religious leader's daughter from the dead. The ones who actually knew who Jesus is are the demons that afflicted the man in the tombs. One could hardly get more unclean than this man, but (Just like the demon-possessed man in Luke 4:31-37) he immediately identifies Jesus (in this case, as "the Holy One of God") and acknowledges his power over the demonic.

The Importance of the Question

There are four reasons why the disciples must grapple with the question of Jesus' identity.

1. Jesus makes three remarkable claims of authority (authority over categories of clean and unclean, authority over forgiveness, and authority over the interpretation and application of the Law) in Luke 5:12-26 and 6:1-11.
2. Jesus construed his messianic ministry in terms that surprised and offended his contemporaries (Luke 4:16-30; 5:27-32; 9:21-22).
3. Jesus required his disciples to embrace an ethic of sacrifice (Luke 9:23-27).
4. People came to Jesus with a wide variety of needs.

Who could make such radical claims about himself and such radical demands of his disciples? Who could meet so many different kinds of needs?

Conclusion

1. Christianity isn't just about believing that Jesus will do what he says he will do. It is about believing that Jesus is who he claims to be.
2. Storms will come to all of us, and it does no good to minimize the peril or ignore the trauma they bring.
3. But storms are also an opportunity for us to examine what we really believe about Jesus and what role our faith plays in our lives.