

“The Fourth Watch”

by Barbara Brown Taylor from

The Preaching Life

- There was a local rumor that the last thing a boatman saw before drowning in Galilee was a ghost on the water [David Hewitt, *Mark* (Baker: Grand Rapids), 1995].
- 1. What about the loaves and fishes might the disciples have missed, which would have left them astounded by Jesus' calming the wind (v. 52)? What *should* they have learned from this incident, and what does Mark hope we will learn? (See the last sentence of the par. in BBT which begins “Then comes the wind...”)
- 2. It is only later in Mark that the disciples are described as recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. In 8:11-13 the Pharisees ask for and are denied a sign. When in 8:14-21 Jesus warns the disciples about the “yeast” of the Pharisees, the look blank, and he pointedly asks them how much food was left over after the feedings of the 5,000 and the 4,000. Jesus himself ascribes their lack of understanding to hardness of heart:

Jesus said to them... Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?’ (Mark 8:18-19)

Only later in 8:27-30, after they see him heal a blind man does Mark say they understood that he was the Messiah. (And so you can safely ignore BBT's comment that she doesn't “know if their hearts got any softer, then or ever.”)

So BBT says the walking on the water “did not fit their expectations; it violated all their categories.” What *were* they expecting in Jesus? (See, e.g., Mark 6:14-16.)

- 3. Read Mark 6:47-52. In 6:50, the phrase translated “it is I” is the Greek *ego eimi*, which was used in Jesus' day to translate the OT phrase “I am” used by God to name himself (Ex 3:14). The author of John, and quite possibly Mark, thought Jesus used used this phrase deliberately upon occasion to point to his true nature.

There is another OT connection, which may have been intentional on Jesus' or Mark's part. Read Job 9, noticing esp. vv. 8 and 11—and v. 33. What are the implications if this *was* deliberate?

- 4. Why does BBT say, “So the storm was not the problem; Jesus was, and he continued to be even after he had soothed them, and identified himself”?
- 5. For Mark this is a story of God's sovereignty and the disciples' blindness. BBT sees it also as a tale of Jesus' love and patience in the face of their hard-heartedness:

According to Mark, Jesus had harsh words for his disciples at least twice again, berating them for their stubbornness, their dullness, for having eyes that did not see and ears that did not hear, but none of that ever seemed to interrupt his love for them. They remained his chosen people, clogged hearts and all, and he remained their Lord—not only the Lord of the sea but also the Lord of the land and of the whole creation—who kept

climbing into their boats to be with them over and over again from that day forth forevermore, with heart enough to spare, oh with heart enough for us all.

a) In what areas might God be waiting for your heart to soften, so you can see outside your preconceptions about Him? Some examples of thinking outside our categories for God might include the following statements:

- If I lose my job, God will take care of me
- The Spirit can inhabit my worship so that my very skin tingles with his presence
- By the grace of God, my future can be about gain rather than about loss
- As I grow older, God really *will* make me more and more like Christ
- God is in control even if the environment appears out of control
- The Spirit can free me from bitterness and enable me to forgive _____
- *etc.*

b) What would it mean to show the same sort of patience and love for the many Christians in American, from liberal to fundamentalist, who are always getting into the news for things which make us frown and embarrass us, Christians who just don't seem to get it?

FOR NEXT WEEK: "I AM WHO I AM."