

CROSSING OVER TO THE OTHER SHORE

Saving God, entering the flood and storm of chaos and confusion: speak peace to our fearful hearts that we might find our faith in the One whose word brings rest to all creation; through Jesus Christ, lord of wind and wave.

from Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare

JUNE 20, 2021

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Job 38:1-11, Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32, John 3:1-17

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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MAY I SPEAK AND MAY WE HEAR FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD
WHO IS CREATING, REDEEMING, AND SANCTIFYING US.

Jesus said to the disciples, "Let's cross over to the other shore."

How do you feel about crossing over to the other shore? We are crossing over to the other shore from the whole COVID pandemic season – to, we can hope, a future we want to live.

It is happening with the state, county and our diocese all dropping the Covid restrictions that have been our constant companions these past 15 months. Not long ago, say January of this year, it seemed interminable. We thought we might have to last until autumn before seeing one another in person again – and maybe it would be 2022. But thanks to the

vaccines, we were back in place by May 23.

Let's cross over to the other shore.

Crossing over to the other shore is about much more than social connections, critical as it is to see one another, see faces, to touch, to embrace.

We can't snap our fingers or wave a wand to make the trauma of well more than 600,000 dead in this country alone (nearly 4 million globally), of all who suffered and didn't die, those who had to go to extremes of work and the pressure of functioning with radically changed patterns and different and often a lack of resources. We

struggled with finding ourselves cut off from our normal patterns, our lives, and the people who shape them with us, of witnessing a deadly virus spread around the entire globe. And in that context, so much additional substantive change and challenge, some of which comes very close to home as we are called to delve more deeply into loving (all of) our neighbors as ourselves through what the AA program calls "a searching, fearless inventory" to face how our own life experiences have allowed deep and destructive inequities to persist in our lives and communities, damaging our sisters and brothers, our neighbors, GLBTQ, of color, poor and low income, and more. We had to see that interconnectedness during COVID.

So much changed so quickly and is now quickly changing again. I'm hearing more and more conversation about what we want or need to take with us as we cross over to the other shore. And what will that journey be like?

We get a sense of it in this gospel story, where the disciples start out and all seems well, Jesus sleeps in the back of the boat, but then a storm arises that threatens their lives. The promise, the hope of what they were doing with Jesus, the horizon toward which they were moving disappears. Fear wells up.

When they awaken Jesus, they ask him in an accusatory way if he doesn't care they are about to die.

The story says Jesus stills the winds and the waves – sort of like the experience we're having now – order, or some semblance of it, restored. The story says: "the wind dropped and everything was perfectly calm."

But then – *after* the restoration of the calm – they got really scared. "But they became filled with fear and said to one another, 'Who is this...'"

I return to a teaching I have shared before by James Finley, the psychotherapist, author, mystic, and teacher, who is part of the Living School faculty at the Center for Action and Contemplation.

Jim says: "If we are absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things, then we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love."

While this teaching may have the ring of honesty to it, it still doesn't sound exactly like what we want – coming, as we do, from a consumerist culture. We want magic, a quick fix, to be airlifted from our circumstances (literally, these days, I'm hearing that airline flights are full to capacity) –

whatever our circumstances are, whenever we hurt or fear or suffer losses. And often churches have promised just that sort of remedy in exchange for particular commitments and loyalty, though God doesn't offer or even recognize the *quid pro quo* of conventional religion.

With Jesus, in the presence of the Only Begotten, the disciples got companionship, they got challenge, they got vision, they got an itinerary of places to go, they got pulled into winds and waves and other life-threatening involvements, they got invitation to change the world, to create a more loving and unified community, but there was no ripcord to pull, no safe room, no bunker. They stayed in the midst of life with everyone else suffering from day to day. And that's what Jesus did every day – went around looking for suffering people....

Jim Finley writes about self-giving generosity, saying that, in reality, it is always kind of messy. He says, "You know, you're exhausted at the end of the day. There's a lot of things that didn't go right. There's a lot of setbacks. There's misunderstandings. So it's a messy sifting, and a give and take, and you go with the flow, you lean into it. You get set back again. In AA the saying is: 'life on life's terms.'"

But he points out that it is all God and God is in all of it, saying: "It's fully incarnate (we live it in our actual selves). You realize that somehow God's the infinity of that transformative process itself. And the very process itself is the immediacy of God."

He says, "if you're going along and your beloved dies, you're diagnosed with cancer, or one of your children gets sick, you don't handle it with mystical serenity, you fall apart."

"But you fall apart with an underlying trust that God's sustaining you as you fall apart. And if you die from it, God's sustaining you as you die. There's an underlying reality... That's why I say God's a presence that protects us from nothing, even as God sustains us in all things. And even that certitude can go away. You can be in a dark night where you momentarily lose the ability to know that."

"And God's the infinity at the perceived absence of God. So even the absence is trustworthy."

So crossing over to the other shore, finding whatever we find in our post-COVID experience is not a visit to the candy store where we can pick and choose what we want. And we have a lot of difficulty in front of us. And there will be more losses – on a public scale that will affect us – as well as privately.

And all the while – as the storm raged – Jesus – the real presence of God was there, not to protect like being wrapped in bubble wrap, but to sustain, to live as life (**Life**) in each of his companions and in all of them together.

And so we can move ahead with our continuing uncertainty, with our discomfort, with the challenge to our egos and identities, **listening** at long last to the experiences of others as they share them, encountering previously unimagined relationships and connections and discovering that all of this is God, God sustaining us in all things even while protecting us from nothing. And that we can "face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love."

We are crossing over to the other shore.



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