

THE JOURNEY AND THE JOURNEY'S END

Lord of living waters you save us from the flood of violence and despair: reach out to us when faith is weak, when we are going under and make us unafraid to walk with you; though Jesus Christ, in whom we are raised.

A Collect for Proper 14A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 14A: 1 Kings 19:9-16; Psalm 85:8-13; Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

AUGUST 13, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

One of the things we all know about boats – anything from an inflatable raft to an ocean liner – is you stay in it or on it. We don't need to be told, "welcome to Queen Mary 2, anytime we're at sea, please stay on the boat."

It's common sense.

So the gospel story today tells of a failure.

The disciple Peter is in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, gets out of the boat, starts to walk to Jesus on the water, gets frightened and begins to sink. Water walk fail.

In the end, everyone ended up in the boat.

So let's broaden the lens a bit...

Jesus sends the disciples across the Sea of Galilee in a boat while he goes to pray. He later *walks* across the water, where a storm has blown up in the meantime, and catches up with the boat and his friends – who are *terrified* to see him like that, of course. Jesus apparently hadn't let them know he would do that sort of thing from time to time – so he lets them know now: don't worry, it's me, don't be afraid....

This is a perfect ending to the whole episode. Nothing else to say. Nothing else to do. Everyone is fine.

And then there's Peter.

What does he really want? He says he wants proof: "Lord, *if* it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

But does he really want proof or does he want a special experience? Does he want to show off? Does he want special powers? Does he feel *compelled* to *be* more or to *do* more than others? Maybe all of these... we've probably all had these thoughts in different circumstances.

The text says that Jesus said, "come."

Of course that was exactly what Peter wanted to hear.

But the wind was blowing like crazy.

What if Jesus *really* said:

"stay in the daggone boat!"

So Peter does what he wants and jumps out of the boat – supposedly to prove that Jesus wasn't lying to them.

How many of the rest of the disciples are rolling their eyes at this point?

Jesus knew an overachiever when he saw one and did what he could for him. But, no surprise here, suddenly, the overachiever, who is (no surprise to anyone but him) *still human*, is suddenly drowning in fear and starts to drown in real life (as it can happen to any of us when fear seizes the day).

And there are so many available fears – for our safety, in the face of global terrorism, with cultural and political reactivity – and personally – what if we don't meet expectations? Or our children don't? And all the unknowns... finances, work, health....

Jesus throws Peter back in the boat, gets in the boat himself (walking on water is probably tiring like walking on sand, but worse) and they are back to where they were a few minutes ago: Nothing else to say. Nothing else to do. Everyone is fine.

Which doesn't, of course, stop the rest of the disciples from rubbing it in. The text says: "And those in the boat worshiped [Jesus,] saying, 'Truly you are the

Son of God.” But what they were *really* saying was: “we knew it was you *without* getting out of the boat – unlike *some* people.”

There are lots of takeaways here – more than I can say, I’m sure. And it’s worth paying attention to them because, frankly, this sort of thing happens to us *all the time*.

A lot of times we’re exhausted, trying to get somewhere and something gets in our way – some storm, some sort of difficulty comes out of nowhere and the thing that was already hard enough gets harder. You aren’t singled out for bad treatment – it’s a millennia’s-old human pattern.

In some way, God shows up but we may not recognize God... may not be aware of God’s presence at all – just the wind, the struggle, the fear for survival... and we may look for signs – someone or something positive or meaningful coming towards us across the waves. Synchronicity? Serendipity? Guidance?

Or we may just wait... which might look like having the gift of knowing what it is to be in a boat on a lake in a storm and that it is just going to be slow going and demanding. Thank God for the ability, the talent and strength to carry on, get to it, and through it.

Or we may, from time to time, need to push the boundaries

of being human. What happens when we get out of the boat? If this is bad, can it get worse? Do we walk on water? (Did Peter show walking on water to be possible or impossible? What does it mean if we’re *often* being asked to walk on water?) Do we learn to swim all over again? Do we gain some new insight into the extent of what we can do (maybe more than we thought), while recognizing, sooner or later, our real limitations?

Do we, eventually, rejoin the community of our friends and family? Or maybe realize they aren’t ever so far away? Welcome the wind dying down, the calm of companionship?

In it all, there’s the confusion, the wonder, the joy, the humor, redefinitions of success and failure, of strength and vulnerability, of what it means to be connected with friends, colleagues, beloved “partners in crime...”

But certainly, we can *know* that God is not confined by a boat. The boat is real – but so is everything outside of it. Jesus water-walking on the Sea of Galilee was not a show-off moment, he wasn’t trying to impress the disciples or us, have his ego stroked. It’s was and is just life for him. God’s reality is total and we are welcomed into it – as much as we can embrace. And what we can’t embrace is still with us in the larger

presence of all of Reality around us.

Peter only got a few steps, but... I wonder if he ever forgot those moments? Were they there for the rest of his life? ...like when he encountered other things that didn't seem possible, but *were* possible in his connection with the sacred, this larger fullness of life and compassion, and this larger, whole divine idea that God had of Peter's life? What about the divine idea that God has for our lives?

It's all of the above and we are invited to explore. If we don't explore we won't know anything about exploring – or discovering....

Thank God for boats – their

insides *and* their outsides, for the water, sometimes to walk on, other times to swim in, or float on, occasionally to flounder in – amazed at how wet it is! Thank God for the people sailing with us who help us know where we are, who we are, where we're going, what we need – who are, often, in themselves, exactly what (who) we need. Thank God for God, called by Dag Hammarskjöld, “the journey and the journey's end” – who is all and in all.

Here is a prayer for all of our crossings of the seas of our lives by Dag Hammarskjöld from his book *Markings*.

Author of the world's joy,
 Bearer of the world's sorrow,
 At the heart of all our distress
 let unconquerable gladness dwell.
 To see You is the end and the beginning,
 You follow me and you go before,
 You are the journey and the journey's end.

*from Dag Hammarskjöld's Markings
 adapted by the Very Rev. Alan Jones*



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