

4 Pent B-2021

The readings this week had me reminiscing, when I first studied this passage from Mark I was attending a training workshop in North Florida somewhere. It was my second workshop to learn how to be an Education For Ministry or EFM facilitator . This is a 4 year class of in depth biblical and theological study for laypeople. The quote unquote retreat was intense and I knew when I looked on the schedule and saw “quiet time “ listed after each dinner I knew they were lying. These sessions always had us doing too much and left me exhausted by the last day.

I remember our Bible reading for the first morning worship was Mark 4: 35-41, the same passage we have today. We had been up late the night before getting acquainted and looking over our very busy schedules and found the storm a wonderful metaphor for what we were going through. I will never forget that throughout the weekend when any one was feeling particularly harried we would say “Hey, jump in the boat” as a reminder that there is always

peace and calm when riding with Jesus. We laughed and laughed at the image of all of us agitated in our own, self imposed chaos while Jesus lounged on a cushion. But when I hear the story today I know the disciples weren't laughing at all at Jesus' lackadaisical attitude in the midst of a storm out on the water in their small boat.

The image is very powerful, we see Jesus in the stern of the boat with his head on a cushion asleep, probably with a slight, peaceful grin on his face -oblivious to the tumult of the storm. And in contrast we witness the apostles, a turbulent and irresponsible group- beside themselves with fear . Although they witnessed many miracles by Jesus up to this point in his ministry they still became frightened in the storm and who could blame them.

To many people living in the desert lands, the sea was fearsome. Its great storms were powerful and destroyed ships and houses built close to its shores. Stories of sea monsters were told by returning sailors. So, the deep, the waters of the sea with its monsters, was a symbol of chaos to the ancient people.

And by the time of Jesus the Jewish people believed that the power of their God was the only thing that could quell the chaos of sea and sky. And this fact was not lost on the evangelists. All four Gospels include a Jesus calming the seas miracle. And could that be because of the way we all can relate to how they felt watching Jesus so calm in the face of impending doom?

In this image of the boat we can see the apostle's frantically running about trying to keep their heads above water (so to speak) and I am sure a lot of praying was going on. They prayed to God, the only one they believed who could calm the chaos around them, while criticizing Jesus for not caring.

I wonder if this image seems familiar to you? Many preachers over the years have said that the boat with its occupants is a symbol of the Church but I know you know someone exactly like the people in it.

Do you know someone who has followed the teachings of Jesus all their life? They've heard the parables of the mustard seed.

They've witnessed first hand the healing power of faith and the wonderful work Jesus does in community. They tend to hear the Word of God selectively, only remembering the things that benefit them personally. They are great friends of Jesus, always by his side but when the storms of life brew up they forget his message about the Kingdom of God. I also know some people like some of the apostles ,who have a knack for stirring up chaos around them all the time.

Have you ever known anyone who just thrives on conflict and drama in their lives?

These are the type of people who are always putting themselves in predicaments and then wondering why God allows it to happen?

How easy is it for us , like the apostles, to complain and criticize God for not coming to our aid when life seems out of control, rather than making our request and then trusting him to answer.

When the men asked if Jesus cared about them they revealed that

they had completely misunderstood his message. The apostle's only saw his miracles as a sideshow performance. They ignored his teaching about the Kingdom of God and that it was within him and all of us. I think the men forgot that Jesus was instilled with the holiness of God and because of this he did not fear the sea and its fury. He had the power, the Spirit of God within him, to tame the chaos but the apostles lacked the faith to realize it.

How often do we all make storms in our lives and then test Jesus to calm them? It's easy for us today to forget that Jesus never wanted to be known by his astounding miracles. We call it the "Messianic Secret." Rather, He wanted us to know him through his teachings and he tried to teach us that he possessed the love, the power and the strength of God in him and when we have faith in this we too share that power, that strength and that same love .

((((((The thing the apostles missed and didn't understand was that the divinity of God was in Jesus and even when Jesus did calm the chaos after their pleading (as no one but the God they believed in could do) they still marveled and were amazed by his power.))))))))

After the EFM training workshop I attended I began to see the image of the boat on the stormy sea as a metaphor not just for the church but for my own relationship with Jesus. I know I am that person who creates waves in my life by worrying waaaayyy too much about stormy situations or troubles that brew up. I try to remember that I have one thing that the apostles didn't have that day on the sea and that is a view of Jesus through the cross.

They were as close to God as a person can be yet did not realize it until they saw Jesus on the cross. For them at that time in Jesus' ministry Jesus was not only a charismatic teacher but he was also what some of the disciples believed to be a very good magician.

And the same applies for us today. If there is no cross in our vision of Jesus then he becomes just a very good wonder worker.

The good news is we all try to follow the teachings of Our Lord or we wouldn't be here or tune into our service today. We have all heard accounts , many times, of his nature miracles and compassionate healings but today we are called to understand the teachings by way of the cross and realize that he was telling us the Truth (with a capitol T) when he said “the spirit of God is within me.” We are called today to understand and see Jesus (as the passage says) just as he is...our risen saviour. He isn't a magician or wonder worker. No matter how great the storms of life become we are called to look at Jesus, jump in the boat with him and witness the love of God for all of us despite living in a world full of chaos.

Amen.

