

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 14:22-33

A Sinking Feeling

Today's gospel story is one of my favorites for a few reasons. It speaks to the mystery of Jesus and God that I just can't explain and as it does that it gives us a concrete example of the life of a disciple. In this event Peter shows us what real discipleship is like. One moment we are afraid, the next moment we trust, and then we doubt, and then we are comforted and then it all begins again. Peter is like most of us who try to be faithful disciples. We want to do the right thing, but perfection just doesn't seem to be something we can reach.

Sometimes we see God with us. We recognize Jesus in moments of bliss when we have some control, like for Peter in the feeding of the 5,000 or in the healing of the blind man but when the Holy comes into our presence in the midst of our fear we doubt God is really there. Because, often in the moments of life when the Spirit is right there with us we fail to identify her, until someone else, or God's spirit seems to make it really, really clear.

Today's gospel story follows the feeding of the five thousand. And after a very busy day Jesus is tired so he goes off on his own to pray. That means this time the disciples were alone in the boat when a terrible storm arose. After they had been fighting the storm all night at about 4am Jesus came walking towards them across the water like an apparition or ghost. Quite frankly I think they had good reason to be afraid. The storm would have been enough to bring up a lot of anxiety in that small boat and then to see a figure walking towards them on the water would have been shocking. Even when they recognized Jesus it would have been unnerving to see him walking across the lake in the dark, in the violence of the storm, doing what was humanly impossible.

I am sure just like all of us would have, they thought they had gone crazy, or the demons of the sea were coming towards them, or any number of imaginative mind boggling explanations rushed through their heads, in that moment of great fear. Because when we fail to recognize the presence of God in those moments, fear is a very, very powerful force.

That is why Jesus appears to the terrified disciples with the words, "Take courage, it is I" And as he does this Peter finds a little faith and as only Peter can he tests Jesus, saying, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And then leaving the boat, Peter briefly walks in faith and then quickly begins to sink and cry out, "Save me!" And as always Jesus does save him this time asking his friend when he will truly begin to trust. It is only then that Peter humbly acknowledges "Truly you are the Son of God."

The Peter in Matthew is an example of all of us as disciples. He is called by Jesus but suffers from uncertainty and doubt throughout his life, only to fail and deny Jesus even in the most crucial time of his crucifixion. And yet Jesus always forgives, always rescues and constantly

strengthens his disciple who is struggling to be faithful. Peter like most of us is an ordinary pilgrim, a regular disciple a very human man of faith. He often misunderstands Jesus, he regularly struggles with doubt and yet still his faith is clearly evident. He hears Jesus say ‘have faith,’ and ‘fear not’ regularly but just like us Peter lives in fear or misplaces his trust.

I think like Peter when we recognize God with us at times of fear, or as we struggle in the storms of life we too can do what may seem humanly impossible.

I don’t want to completely ignore the fact that even if just for a moment when Peter recognized Jesus and he listened to Jesus say, “Come,” he got out of the boat in a response that defies all logic. And for a moment he did the impossible. Until he resorted back to doubt and fear.

I found it interesting as I read through commentaries this week to find that many recognize the boat in this event as a symbol of false security. It made me wonder what are the false securities that we hold onto rather than faith and trust? Is it our money, our materialism, our homes, our traditions, our variety of vices? What is it? What is the boat in your life you are afraid to get out of because just thinking about it gives you ‘a sinking feeling?’ What is the boat in your life that keeps you from wholeness? What is the boat in your life that keeps you from trusting God will take care of you? What are the fears that you hold onto that keep you from stepping out in faith and trust?

Fear was the one and only reason Peter could not walk on water in that moment. He looked around at the worldly reality of the storm, the physics of the water, the incomprehensibility of the situation, the absurdity of it all, and fear overwhelmed him and he began to sink. I don’t judge Peter for that I think most of us would have done the same. Or more likely we wouldn’t have gotten out of the boat in the first place. But what happens next reminds us that faith and doubt are almost always intertwined because after stepping out in faith, and then sinking with doubt he looked back to Jesus with faith once again and cried out “Lord, save me.”

As we go from here this week, as we live into the reality that summer is half over and we begin to think ahead I wonder where is God calling you out in faith this year? What are the boats of fear you need to step out of? Are you ready to trust a little more? Are you willing to live in fear a little less? God is calling to out of the boat, he is wanting you to let go of the fears, the feelings that you just might sink if you give faith a try. This week let’s all give faith another chance and try trust rather than fear and doubt.

may we so live. Amen.