

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Reflection

I Kings 19:9, 11-13; Psalm 84:9-14; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33

I grew up around boats, waterskiing and sailing. (My dad raced sailboats). I have owned a boat and navigated the waters in Southeast Alaska for nearly 30 years. I have been a commercial boat captain for 13 years. I have been on many boats and have experienced some intense storms. However, I never thought, unless I was docked, at anchor or waterskiing that getting out of the boat was a good idea. Especially during a storm!

It seems odd to me that Peter would make such a request to Jesus. "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water." Did Peter really want to get out of the boat? Why didn't he say something like, "Lord, if it is you, please calm the seas." Or "If it is you, HURRY and come in the boat and save us." We'll look closer at Peter's request later, but first let's review.

Jesus had sent the disciples in the boat to cross the sea of Galilee and they encountered strong winds and heavy seas. Many of the disciples, including Peter, were fishermen so they had plenty of experience handling rough seas through the night. Yet, this night or more accurately this early morning, around 4:00am, was different. This morning, in the midst of the storm, Jesus appeared walking on the water.

Matthew recalls the story writing, "When the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified. 'It is a ghost' they said, and cried out in fear." But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.'"

What grace-filled, comforting words. "Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid." In this COVID-19/ Racial unrest/ Political/ Uncertain storm we are living in, these words of Jesus could not be more timely. Jesus knows all the storms of our lives and walks right in the middle of the chaos. In the midst of the storm, Jesus speaks words of encouragement, assurance and peace.

It would be a good idea to write these words on a card and put them on your refrigerator and/or bathroom mirror. **"Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid."**

The root word of Courage is “Cor” which means “Heart”. Jesus is encouraging the disciples and you and me not to lose heart, but instead, to take heart. Jesus wants our hearts to beat with love and trust, not anxiety and fear.

To be courageous is to be all in with your heart, soul and mind. To Love Jesus no matter what the circumstances or how high or strong the winds and waves may be.

We live in a time when so many people are losing heart. So many people are living in discouragement and struggle. Our lives have been battered by the waves of uncertainty and unrest. The winds and waves have made many people tired and exhausted. It is to all who are struggling, all who are battling the storms of life that Jesus offers encouragement. “Courage!”

We all need assurances in our lives. We all need to know Jesus is with us and for us. Jesus’ words “It is I” offers just that. Jesus knows the disciples feared he was a ghost so he quickly assures them of his identity. The “Great I” was with them. The “Great I” is with us. If the “little i’s” who are us, can trust the “Great I” who is Jesus, then the “little i’s” can rest in the assurance that the “Great I” has us covered. As Henry Nouwen prayed, “God will never leave us to face our perils alone.” Jesus, the “Great I”, is with us always.

In the midst of a storm on the sea of Galilee Jesus came to the disciples offering them words of encouragement, assurance and peace, “Do not be afraid.” These would be the very words the Risen Jesus would share again with his disciples in the upper room. Here, walking on water, Jesus offers these vital words of peace, “Do not be afraid.” Yet, we are people who too often live in fear.

Fear is not good for our minds and our bodies. Fear can affect our breathing, blood flow, memory, muscles, aging process, decision making, and have many other negative side effects. According to Big Think.com, “we are inundated with messages of fear from our televisions to our political conversations. We feel more afraid of the world and our own neighbors now than we have in decades. But all that fear isn’t good for us.” In fact, according to neuroscience, fear is drastically affecting our physical and emotional wellbeing.

Jesus knows our fears and comes with words of peace, “Do not be afraid.”

“Courage, It is I, Do not be afraid.” These words are powerful, life giving, and peace inducing. They are also an invitation to greater intimacy with Jesus. Immediately after Jesus speaks Matthew writes, “ It was Peter who answered. ‘Lord,’ he said ‘if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.’ ‘Come’ said Jesus. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water.”

It is remarkable that Peter walked on water, but why get out of the boat? Why not trust Jesus words and wait in the boat? It seems Peter is witnessing to the disciples and to us a heart of courage, a heart that is all in for Jesus. Peter is revealing his faith and trust in the “Great I” and Peter is demonstrating a peace this world cannot offer, a peace beyond the comfort of a boat. A peace revealed in a wholehearted trust and focus on Jesus. For Peter being with Jesus was everything, even if that meant getting out of the boat.

Peter got out of the boat because Jesus said, “Come”. This is the fourth statement from the mouth of Jesus walking on the stormy waves. It is as essential as the others. If you write Jesus’ words on a card for your frig or mirror, make sure to add “Come”. Jesus is calling each of us to come to him, especially in the midst of our fears and the storms of our lives.

Earlier in Matthews Gospel, Jesus said to his disciples, “Come to me all who are tired of carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Come all who are tired of the boat ride and want true rest and peace for your souls. “Come!”

Peter didn’t make it too far on the water before he got distracted by the wind and waves and begin to sink. “As soon as Peter felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink. ‘Lord! Save me!’ he cried. Jesus put out his hand at once and held him.”

Sometimes we need to get out of the boats of our comfort levels, out of the boats of our self-protection, before we can recognize our total and utter reliance on God to save us and lead us to life.

Peter might be teaching us more in his sinking than he did in his walking on water. The goal really isn’t to walk on water, the goal is intimacy with Jesus. Jesus puts his hand out to all who call on his mercy. My guess is Peter remembered Jesus’

outstretched hand and saving mercy more than his few steps of water walking. It never was about the water, it was always and should always be about Jesus.

If you write that card with Jesus' words, you might want to add Peter's as well, "Lord! Save me!"

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve