

*In the name of God, who cares deeply for each of us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.*

In this season after Pentecost, the green season, we sequentially read through the Gospel appointed. The green of our vestments and paraments is a symbol of growth in faith and discipleship. I used to say, at the beginning of this green season, that like Kermit, “It’s not easy being green.” But not with these vestments. This vibrant green really reflects growth, aliveness, action, being on the move with Jesus. Thank you, Altar Guild.

Since we’re in the year of Mark, Year B, we’ll read Mark’s Gospel consecutively now until Advent. With the exception of some Sundays in August when our lessons will be from John, we’ll hear a lot of Mark. In order to tell the story of Jesus, Mark invented a literary form called “gospel”. (Mark’s was the first Gospel to be written.) And the primary image within the gospel is a *journey*. Jesus is on a journey. At the beginning of the gospel, Jesus invites a group of ordinary people to travel with him. To be a disciple is to be on a journey with Jesus.

And in today’s gospel, the journey becomes perilous. It is “evening” (4:35). Jesus is crossing over, and he invites his disciples to go with him, “leaving the crowd behind” (4:36). Now, it is just Jesus and his disciples, except for the “other boats” that were with them.

When the waves beat against the boat in the storm, Jesus is asleep on a cushion (4:38)! The disciples cry out, “Do you care if we are perishing?” It is a heavy question, shouted out in the middle of the storm. Does Jesus care if we perish? His serenity in the middle of a terrifying storm is impressive, but does Jesus’ calm extend to the fate of his disciples as well? It’s a story that is told, in response to this basic question of faith: does Jesus care?

His response is not what the disciples expected, or they would not have reacted the way they did. They saw Jesus perform miracles of healing and casting out demons, yet this act of control over the elements of sea and sky stunned them. In an instant they are removed from the life-threatening situation and brought to a new place—not just of safety, but also of understanding, even if they can not yet fully comprehend the circumstances or the place itself.

How often throughout the Gospels does Jesus do the unexpected? When faced with a hungry crowd and almost no food on hand, he sits the people down and feeds them. When teaching his followers who their neighbor is, the hero of his story is a despised Samaritan. When the disciples are faced with another dangerous storm on the lake, Jesus walks to them on the water.

To us, 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, these stories, passed down over the generations, have become part of the familiar fabric of our lives. We may question the mechanics of the miracles, or even the thinking of the observers, but more often than not, we are not startled by Jesus’ actions in the way his disciples and the others in these stories are. No matter how cynical one may be, or how little one believes that miracles like those in the Gospels can happen, deep down we expect Jesus to do something.

This story is a metaphor for life. Many of us may never get caught in a boat in a storm or a hurricane, but we do have many storms in our lives. We have many occasions when we struggle, when we’re beset by crises, when we feel alone and isolated, and we look to Jesus for help, and Jesus seems asleep on the job. The answer to the disciples’ query, to our own pleas to Jesus when we’re struggling, when we’re overwhelmed by crisis or tragedy: **Jesus does care.** He arises and stills the raging storm. Jesus not only cares but he also acts. Jesus is the one who, when it is dark and all hope seems lost, rises, speaks, rebukes the wind and the waves, and saves those who, without his care and act, would be lost. But sometimes Jesus’ caring, saving of us, is not exactly what we

expected. I recently read this statement, “Sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes the Lord lets the storm rage and calms his child.”

Most of us do not get miracles like the disciples did that day on the lake. And when we don’t, it’s not about a lack of faith. Getting a miracle in one’s life is not a litmus test of one’s faith. *Miracles remind us that the way things are now are not always the way they will be*; that the kingdom of God breaks through, and for a moment we see how things will be, *or how they really are in the mind of God*. But then life goes back to what it was.

Doubts about God invariably surface in times of crisis. Mark’s readers were familiar with persecution and threats to their lives, because they were believers. The disciples’ doubts and uncertainties were consolation to later believers, and also encouragement about God’s saving presence. Jesus does care, and Jesus does act.

Our struggles with faith, with belief in Jesus, are not meant to be borne alone. We are in this community to struggle together, to discover together, to learn together, to support one another in this faith walk. And part of this faith journey is learning to trust and believe in one another. It’s hard to believe when we do not strengthen ourselves with the fellowship of others who believe. In the words of Barbara Crafton, “I don’t think faith is all about going to heaven or going to hell. I think it is about the love of God where we are. About learning to listen and look for the signs of God everywhere. About seeing and serving Christ in our neighbors, near and far. Faith is about giving our lives to God, in all their ambiguity, without being certain of very much at all.”<sup>1</sup>

The disciples who traveled with and followed Jesus, and tried to understand who he was and what his mission was about were ordinary folk like you and me. In a sense we have the advantage over them because we know more of the story than they did, we have the experience of 2000 years. But we come with our own biases and prejudices against believing. And so we too struggle as they did to understand, to trust, to commit ourselves to Jesus, and to one another.

Sue Monk Kidd, in the wonderful book *The Mermaid Chair*, writes about community: “It reminded him (Whit, the central character) suddenly of the whole point of existing here with these curmudgeonly old men – that somewhere on the face of the earth, there needed to be people bound together with irrevocable stamina, figuring out a way to live with one another. He’d come here with such idiotic notions, expecting a slight variation on utopia – everybody loving everybody else, returning good for evil, turning the other cheek left and right. Monks, it’d turned out, were no more perfect than any other group of people. He’d gradually realized with a kind of wonder that they’d been picked for a hidden but noble experiment – to see if people might actually be able to live in genuine relatedness, to see if perhaps God had made a mistake by creating the human species.”<sup>2</sup>

God has neither made a mistake, nor abandoned us. God loves and cares deeply for each of us, for Jesus’ disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and for us disciples in 2009 in Westport, and all people everywhere. Jesus supports and sustains us, even when we are floundering, there is nothing that can ever separate us from that boundless and never-ending love that God has for us. Nothing!

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> *Let Us Bless the Lord*, Vol. 1, Yr. 1, p.20.

<sup>2</sup> P. 268