

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost 2020

When the wind is strong and the waves are high,

remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

~ Christine Longhurst

Our Gospel reading this morning has so much depth and possibilities.

It is a very rich passage, at any time, but especially with all that we are living through right now. Was there anything in this passage that spoke to you today? Even if just a few words.

For those watching on Facebook Live this morning, take some time today to read it again and just let it sit with you a bit.

Jesus had not yet had a chance to mourn his cousin's death at the hands of Herod. After he learned about what had happened to John the Baptist, he got into a boat and tried to withdraw privately to a solitary place to pray. But a crowd awaited him on the other side of the Lake. We heard about the feeding of the 5,000 men and their families last week.

Today's reading takes up after the people have been fed and Jesus dismisses the crowd. He withdraws to pray and **finally** to have some alone time. The disciples have left to go back to the other side of the lake. Jesus prays until late into the night.

The disciples, meanwhile, are having a heck of a time fighting the waves which are battering the boat. They are fighting strong winds. The Gospel of John tells us that they are 3-4 miles out from the shore and it is still dark. I checked it out, and the Sea of Galilee, is

just over 8 miles wide. So, they were only ½ way across. They have got to be discouraged and tired. Suddenly, a figure is approaching out of the darkness. Now I imagine that almost any of us would have been a little scared at this sight. Despite the howling wind and the waves crashing against the boat, they hear Jesus saying to them; “‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ They recognized his voice.

I am guessing that if we were in the boat, our immediate response would have been to tell Jesus to grab a hand and climb in. Apparently, no one says this. Instead, Peter calls out for Jesus: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you **in the water**”. Seems a little strange to me. Maybe Peter has always wanted to walk on water. Maybe he thought; “If Jesus can do this, so can I”. It wouldn't have been my first thought. We don't know why. But Jesus says OK. Come on out. No matter how courageous Peter thought he may have been, once he was out of the safety of the boat, he panicked and began to sink. He cried out for Jesus to save him.

As I said, there is a lot to chew on with this passage.

I hadn't thought of this before, but Jesus could have calmed the storm before he walked out to the boat. He could have quieted the waves before Peter hopped out of the boat. But he didn't do either one. For him, the storm just wasn't an issue. **He was in control.**

When the storms of life rage around you, do you keep your eyes focused on the problem or the problem solver?

Johnny Cash once described the period in his life when he came very close to death due to an extreme addiction. He painted a dire picture of a man facing a storm and had hit rock

bottom. He said; "There was a point in my life that the only person that would talk to me was the Lord, and the only woman that would have me was Betty Ford."

He acknowledged that his faith had saved him from suffering the same fate of an early death as so many of his peers. Mr. Cash had a deep faith even at his lowest points in life. Knowing there was always a hand holding his, allowed him to obtain the strength to ask for help. He kept his focus on Jesus, as best he could, and this got him through his personal storms.

I thought of this when I remembered Joseph sitting in the bottom of a dry well where he had been thrown by his brothers. I would not be at all surprised if his first thoughts were, thanksgiving for the well not being full. His next thoughts may have been, "Why Me" but also thankful that he was safe and had not been killed. He certainly had no idea of what was to come. We do know that despite the unforeseen events that Joseph faced, he found favor with God and he maintained his faith.

Think of all the storms that we have faced over the past 5-6 months. Our normal lives, whatever they had been, were stopped short as COVID -19 began to pick up steam.

Sheltering in place took on a whole new meaning for us and so many people lost their jobs as a result. Those who didn't, often continued to go to work at the risk of their lives. Many of those folks were people of color and those living on the margins of society. They did not have the luxury of working from home. Hospitals were over run with those who struggled to survive and were left alone without physical contact with their families and loved ones to sustain them. Over 160,000 Americans have lost their lives.

Then came the death of George Floyd and the protests throughout the country which often led to violence. The storms were indeed huge and we felt like we were rowing against the wind throughout the night. Many of us are very tired. Much like the disciples who in the middle of their storm, weren't expecting to find Jesus coming to them in the darkness, we are surprised when Jesus comes to us in unexpected ways.

I think that what is important in our readings today, at least for me, is that Joseph kept this faith in God and that got him through. Regardless of why Peter thought it necessary to get out on the water to walk to Jesus, **had he kept his focus** on the Lord, and not been distracted by the storm raging around him, he would have been fine. Even when he became frightened and panicked, Jesus was right there to hold on to him and raise him up. There is so much that we don't know right now. **We really don't know what we don't know.** The only surety in life that we can count on is Jesus.

There is a song that I am going to play now that will hopefully tie all of this together. The words are in your bulletin and since we are outside and wearing a mask, go ahead and sing if you want to. It is called; "“Didn't I walk on the water” and is sung by The Dunaways.

As I kneel in the darkness in the middle of the night, I'm praying for assurance everything's going to be alright Lord, I see another battle out in front of me

I'm afraid I won't be able and I'll go down in defeat. He said, do you remember where I brought you from just take a look behind you at how far you've come

Oh, and every time you ask me didn't, I deliver you

so why would you be thinking that I wouldn't see you through

Didn't I walk on the water and I calmed the raging sea I spoke to the wind, it hushed and I gave you peace. Didn't I run to your rescue,

didn't I hear you when you called.

I walked right beside you just so you wouldn't fall

Didn't I leave all of heaven just to die for your sins, searched until I found you and I'd do it all again

Now she's talking to her father in a house that was once a home.

she said my bills are coming due Lord and six days is not that long

she hears a voice so soft and low He says I've moved like that before I'll do this little thing and I'll oh, I'll give you so much more

Didn't I walk on the water and I calmed the raging sea I spoke to the wind, it hushed and I gave you peace. Didn't I run to your rescue; didn't I hear you when you called.

I walked right beside you just so you wouldn't fall

Didn't I leave all of heaven just to die for your sins, searched until I found you and I'd do it all again

Didn't I leave all of heaven just to die for your sins, searched until I found you and I'd do it all again

Amen