

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?
June 20, 2021

Happy Father's Day to all fathers, grandfathers, godfathers, Rev. Fathers, fathers-to-be!!!

In the spring of 2012 we joined the Diocesan Holy Land Pilgrimage which included a fishing boat ride in the Sea of Galilee, or more accurately, the Lake of Galilee. It was a cloudy day and the lake was calm at the beginning but we were warned the weather could change suddenly and sure enough it was very windy when we're in the middle of the lake. Lake of Galilee is situated on an ancient trade route that linked Egypt with Syria and Mesopotamia. Although the lake continues to provide an abundance of fish for the fishing industry, most of the ancient towns have long since been abandoned. But in Jesus's time, people from all over the Roman world would have passed through the area on their way to other parts of the known world. It plays an important role in the stories of Jesus that have been handed down to us in the Gospels. By its shores he recruited his first disciples, gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fed the five thousand. He and his disciples crossed its waters many times as they traveled through the region, and on it the story we heard in this Sunday's gospel took place. (Mark 4:35-41)

At thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, the lake appears rather small to experience a storm as violent as the one Mark tells us. However, because of its unique geographic low-lying area surrounded by hills, it is prone to sudden and sometimes violent storms due to changing weather. As local fishermen, Peter, James, John, and Andrew were intimately familiar with the unpredictable weather, including violent storms, and how to handle it. That they panic and wake Jesus up from what was probably a much-needed nap shows that this particular storm was extraordinarily severe, worse than they had experienced. The storm has pushed the disciples to their limit. In spite of their knowledge of boats and the Galilean weather, their boat is sinking. In desperation, they wake Jesus, not simply to warn him that his own life is in danger, but because they had nowhere else to turn. **"Don't you care that we are drowning?"** It's more than just a question, it's a desperate cry for help. They felt hopeless and wanted out. They called out to Jesus. His response is not what they expected. 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 cannot yet fully comprehend the circumstances or the place itself. **How often throughout the Gospels does Jesus do the unexpected? Like feeding a hungry crowd with almost no food on hand, like teaching his followers their neighbour is a despised Samaritan, like walking on the water to calm another storm.**

To the modern Christian, 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's 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. **How many times in life do we find ourselves in a storm beyond our ability to handle?** When we reach our limits trying to handle the situation, we simply want out of it. And when it becomes desperate enough, we often find ourselves crying out to Jesus, **"Do you care that we are perishing?"** Jesus's response can, and does, still take us by surprise.

There was a man who found himself in financial trouble after some poor planning and decision-making. He was on the verge of losing what little he had left and prayed desperately for help in finding his way through the mess. He gave up a job he loved for a higher pay job that he hated in order to pay the bills. Just as it seemed all was lost, his former employer asked if he could possibly come and work through some critical projects for his company. The former employer was willing to work around the unpredictable travel schedule of his current new job. Although it has taken some adjustments to work two jobs, he is slowly clearing up his debts. His former boss, instead of being mad at his quitting, was like the father waiting and welcoming his "Prodigal Son" back. After paying off his debt, he did rejoin his former company, which offered him a higher pay and more senior position. What a blessing. He has come to an unexpected place.

In a recently married young family, the husband lost his job due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and they were barely surviving on the wife's income from a low-paying church job. The husband's job search stretched from months to a year. They prayed that the right job would come along. Then one day the husband had a sudden thought. He turned to his wife and said, **"We have been praying for the right job to come along, but maybe it's the right job for you and not me."** How true it is. His wife was in peace and joy coming home everyday after work. Being able to answer phones from the needy and prayed with them is a blessing; decorating the church to welcome the Lord's presence is a blessing too. This inspiration shed new light on their situation. It opened the eyes and ears of the husband. Then he found out that the local food-bank was looking for someone to run it. He applied and got the job with ok pay. After a week, he was so happy that though he couldn't find the good pay job he had prayed for, he was now able to serve the community and help feed the hungry. What a blessing. This, too, brought them to an unexpected place.

These two stories are not as dramatic as the calming of the storm on the lake of Galilee. They are not what we would consider a miracle. Yet these people cried out in their time of trouble, and they came to that unexpected place where Jesus can bring us. **"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"** Jesus asks. **Because we are human, we struggle with our fears and our limits just as the disciples did.** Yet, if we remain open to the unexpected, Jesus will see us through, in spite of our doubts, fears, and lack of faith. **Faith allows someone to live in detachment from all the ups and downs of life.** In these stories, I hear our beloved Teacher's words directed to the storm inside of me as we face a sea of uncertainty. As St. Ignatius of Loyola says: **"As far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short life."** Someone that lives in that kind of detachment is free, and because they are free, they are powerful. They are beyond the threats that arise in the context of this world. **This is the source of dynamis, of real power.**

Lord Jesus Christ, with the aid of your Holy Spirit increase our faith so that we may see your hand at work in even the smallest details of our daily life: a sunset, a flower, a child's smile. May we have the humility to realize that we still have much to learn about our faith, and the generosity to share the truth about you with others. Amen.