

PROPER 7B – 2018 (Graduates)

1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49

Psalm 9:9-20

2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

Mark 4: 35-41 [5:1-20]

Make firm, Lord God, the faith of your Christian people, that success may not fill us with worldly pride nor the storms of life lay us low. Rather, whatever may befall, teach us to recognize your quiet but calming presence and to count on you as the unseen companion who faithfully accompanies us throughout life's journey. We ask this through Christ, with whom you have raised us up in baptism, the Lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.ⁱ

In Mark's Gospel, the first 34 (thirty-four) verses of Chapter 4 have Jesus teaching on the shore of the lake. So many people gathered to hear him, that Jesus got into a boat and preached from his floating pulpit, with the people gathered on the shoreline. He taught in parables, including the stories about the seed scattered on the ground and the mustard seed—the stories we heard in last week's Gospel. Today's story starts when Jesus finishes. ³⁵ ***On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'*** ³⁶ ***And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.*** ³⁷ ***A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.***

Stories about the sea encompass all the things in life—beauty, power, fear, life, and death. You all are blessed to be near enough to the water to go watch the sun rise or the sun set. If you want to go and walk or sit, you can brave the bugs and be near the water. Most of the disciples were people who lived and worked and traveled near the sea and on the sea. In today’s Gospel, they decide to get in a boat and head across the water to a quieter place.

Notice what happens in this Gospel story – Jesus invites the disciples to go and do something new!!! He says: “Let’s go somewhere else!” God is always inviting us to go and do something new!!! For those people who just graduated from high school, there is a clear jump from the old routine to something entirely different. For people who move from one place to the other, there is a clear change of HOME and Neighborhood and everything from dry cleaners to grocery stores. If you have a new illness, you are being invited into a world with a new language, new treatments and adjustments to new restrictions on your diet or mobility. At every age, God has something new planned for us now or soon.

New things can be exciting! But, new things can also be scary! Usually, they are both at the same time. In the Gospel story, the

disciples don't appear to have done a lot of planning. It says they took Jesus with them, "**just as he was**". We don't know exactly what that means: without a lifejacket? Without a raincoat? Without food or water? They did not wait until morning, when at least they could see! They do not seem to have planned for a major storm, nor for the boat to take on so much water that it was being swamped. There is always a tension between trusting Jesus and being practical. The disciples had confidently headed out with Jesus and found themselves in a dangerous and scary situation. Whatever new things you are heading toward, there will be things ahead that you could not plan for or did not plan for. That's the way human life works!

The disciples set out in the boat with Jesus. He calmly curls up in the back of the boat and falls asleep. He's been preaching and explaining those parables all day, surrounded by crowds. Now, all he wants is some rest and a change of venue. Suddenly, a storm comes up and the boat is tossed and the disciples are soaked and pushed from side to side on the boat. Jesus just sleeps on. There is thunder and lightning and wind. Jesus sleeps on. The disciples have had enough – An easy English version of the Bible reads:..**the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat**

was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (ESV)

Despite being with Jesus, the disciples were terrified and pretty angry from the sound of it, that Jesus was sleeping through their terror. We can all feel the same way. When you hit a stormy patch of life, you can be like one of the disciples in that boat. We can feel like God is far away or asleep, that God does not care what happens to us, that God has left us to face the terrible things that happen all by ourselves.

One writer on this passage said: *Like the disciples, I am quick to assume the worst about Jesus when the going gets rough. When I face fearsome circumstances, my go-to position is not trust; it's suspicion. In my fear, I conjure up a God who is stony-faced, implacable, and loveless. A God to whom I am expendable. What should be a rich, vibrant, and multifaceted relationship between my heart and God's becomes instead purely consumerist and transactional: Okay, Jesus, prove that you care about me by fixing my circumstances. I'll do A (trust and love you) if you'll do B (protect and save me).* ⁱⁱ I assume that you, like me, have bargained with God this way before.

Bishop Andy Doyle calls out our fears: *..in the midst of life and restless travels we have difficulty in reminding ourselves of God's kingdom in our midst, of God's power at work in the world about us. ...Let us be honest about our faithlessness. Let us groan and bewail our situations. Let us wonder where God's power is. And let us remember that it is in the weak, in our own weakness, that we discover God's power working in us. Then let us also see that what is old is being made new, and what has died is being raised up.*

When we are men and women in trouble, we want God to meet our expectations instead of accepting that God is ahead of us and beyond us in ways that we cannot understand. **Our job is to trust God.** What the disciples had to learn is that Jesus was reliable. They did need trust and recognize their need to call upon his name, **Jesus, wake up, we need you.....**

Those frightened men called out and Jesus answered. **...he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"**

Trust God. God is with us, Jesus was with the disciples. Being a disciple of Jesus means learning to trust in his presence and power, even in the hard times. Being a disciple of Jesus requires reflecting on our experiences with Jesus, so that we are less afraid when the stormy times come. This story about Jesus calming the storm at sea is so important that it appears four times in the Bible. It is told by all four Gospel writers; one theme with variations in detail. Those disciples learned to trust Jesus and to call upon him when they were afraid. Their faith and trust were reinforced by Jesus's actions. They were afraid again later when Jesus was arrested and killed. They hid in fear. But, they came to trust and joy again in light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. They later went on to proclaim the Good News about Jesus to people around the world. Their faith, their trust, and their testimony were reinforced by their memories of what Jesus had said and done. They learned that memories from their own lives could be used to help them move forward.

- The disciples remembered Jesus' miraculous power to transform, to heal, to understand, and to even calm the winds and waves!!!
- Jesus Himself modeled faith and hope; calm and courage to the disciples.

In stormy weather and sunshine; in life and in death; in good times and bad: **if we call upon the name of Jesus, we are and will be saved.** I want us to end by praying again, in light of what we have heard, the Collect for the Day in your leaflet. Please pray it with me if you will:

O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.

ⁱ *From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year B, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992*

ⁱⁱ Debie Thomas, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1813-crossing-to-the-other-side>