

Proper 7-B
June 23-24, 2018
St. John's Cathedral

I grew up watching storms roll over the water. A south wind usually meant rain. Whitecaps on the bay meant wind and the waves often grew to larger swells that would challenge the little wooden boat that my father had built in the basement and later equipped with a 3-horse Evinrude.

As kids we fished from that boat, we putted up and down the shore, and once, wrapped in our orange kapok life jackets, we crossed a mile of open water to Erland's point – just because we could. The trip home was rougher – with winds and tides working against us. It was a serious lesson for a couple of seventh-graders who underestimated the power of nature.

Today we went on a stormy boat ride with Jesus and his disciples. A bumpy, scary journey across the water to the other side of the lake. They left the familiar shore of Capernaum and set out across the water to the other side – the less familiar territory of the Gerasenes – a foreign place to them.

This is a multi-layered story for sure, and it is also a familiar one. It is a story of being afraid. Of disciples wondering if they would survive. Of being at the mercy of the wind and waves as a strong storm pounded their boat and tested their courage. And it is also a story of crossing to the other side – their original mission.

We need to note that as the boat is being battered by the waves and filling with water, Jesus is calmly sleeping at the stern. The disciples are not quite so calm and wake him up, wondering if he really cared that they were about to die.

Jesus seems to be the picture of composure. He stands up and commands the sea, "Peace! Be still! And then it was calm again. And he wonders why his friends are so scared—wonders where their faith is.

I'm sure many of us have some personal stories of stormy seas – both literally on the water and figuratively in the storms of life. As we hear this biblical miracle story today, I think we can hear it from two perspectives.

First, it is a pastoral story – a miracle of being rescued from perishing in a storm. Jesus' presence and his authority over the storm save the day. The second is more of a mission perspective. How did this healing presence of Jesus empower his disciples and also how does it empower us to enter into the storm as bearers of his love?

This story, from the pastoral perspective, reminds us that Jesus is with us in our stormy times. And that is good news. Those ways that life tosses us about like a boat bobbing on a windy sea. The magazine the Christian Century had a recent issue that shared brief stories that readers contributed about their experiences of storms and what had given them strength in the face of that chaos. A couple of them were literally about riding out a terrifying storm – a hurricane – stories of loss and disorientation. A house flattened. Living in a shelter. Losing a beloved pet and relinquishing family photos and grandpa's pocket watch. One woman who had lost much, simply said, "Jesus came to us through the volunteers and in our worship." That was what brought some calm in a terribly tough spot.

Another story was of two women who traveled from Illinois to Cape Cod to be with another dear friend who was on the verge of a miscarriage. It felt like a

personal storm. When they arrived, a nor'easter, a violent winter storm, arrived, too, and the three friends hunkered down as the power went out. She wrote, "I felt so small compared to the storm outside, compared with the storm inside. Chaos and creation swirling together. We all felt very small. But God is bigger than our fear." And together they prayed for healing and renewal.

In the storms of our lives, Jesus comes to say, in unique ways, "Peace. Be still."

The other perspective is to hear this as a story of mission and empowerment. A story of crossing to the other side of the lake. Of venturing into new territory. Of seeing things anew. The disciples were on their way to some unexplored territory.

We have to wonder how this miraculous stilling of the storm was a life-changing epiphany for them. How did they apprehend Jesus after this experience? How did their relationship with him change? How were they beginning to see in new ways.

One commentator muses that maybe this demonstration of Jesus' authority over the stormy sea was a coming-of-age moment for them. Who, they ask, is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

In a sense they moved from being friends and companions of Jesus to really becoming disciples. They became part of the movement. Part of the ministry with him. Ready to assume more risk and more responsibility as they moved about on their mission journey to share love and hope.

We can also see this as encouragement to look at our own call, our own opportunity, our own responsibility to move through the storms as bearers of love and mercy as Jesus showed. And those storms are all around us in different forms.

One of those storms – the real elephant in the room this week and today – is the unfolding crisis of refugee and immigrant families from Mexico and Central America. The epicenter is in a series of border towns where many are seeking entry or asylum in our country. Some are driven there by the terror of violence, and others are seeking a more secure life for themselves and their families, fleeing places that are dangerous and or impoverished.

This week I've asked myself what I would do if my children and I were in a similar situation. And I have also remembered that we have members of this cathedral community who have also fled their home countries for similar reasons.

The reception at the border with Mexico this week has been anything but graceful. Many have been arrested and charged with the misdemeanor of illegal entry or have run into the jaws of a no-tolerance policy that has separated parents from children, each of whom now has their own form of incarceration. More than 2,000 children, some as young as infants, are scattered across the country – some in our own state. Some holding facilities house kids in cage-like accommodations where they sleep on the floor.

We would have to be living in a cave not to have seen and heard the agony over this. And perhaps we feel pretty helpless in the face of it. How do we, as followers of Jesus – who promise at our baptisms to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being – respond to this

tragic development? How can we be bearers of love, mercy and justice in the face of this?

Our Bishop, Gretchen Rheberg, and our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, have both spoken out. Bishop Rheberg reminds us of the importance of family – and adds that the families separated at the border are, in the broader sense, our own brothers and sisters. To ignore their plight, she says, is to ignore Christ in our midst.

Bishop Curry, also decrying the separation of families, calls this both unbiblical and un-Christian. He reminds us of those vital touchstones of our faith: Love your neighbor. Welcome the stranger.

Like the disciples, we are in some new territory that is calling us to a conversion of heart. Calling us to see in a new way. To act in a new way. What we see may move us deeply and we must pay attention to that and ask ourselves how we can be those bearers of justice and love in our time. What can we say or what can we do to reflect integrity of what we feel in our hearts?

Today we come together to celebrate Eucharist, gathering in community and being opened to the nourishment of bread and wine that are the body and blood of Jesus -- and then being sent forth to love and serve. A Spanish Eucharistic prayer dedicated to the plight of immigrants prays, “Fill us with your grace and blessing, that we may be artisans of your justice and instruments of your peace in this torn world...”.

May we be empowered to be those artisans for the sake of Jesus and the sake of our world.

