

**August 9, 2020**

Another memorable miracle story... Jesus walking on the water... I'm sure you've seen that bumper sticker— "Next time you think you're perfect, try walking on water." While the intent might be to remind people to be humble, it does it in a ridiculing way. Probably not what Jesus had in mind by walking on the water.

Our gospel story happens right after the feeding of the five thousand... Jesus just learned that John the Baptist had been be-headed, the backdrop is human violence... And Jesus responds to that with curing the sick and feeding the five thousand. The contrast is between fear and violence, and love and compassion.

In our reading today we have Jesus in prayer, the disciples in a boat, wind and waves, fear and terror, Jesus walking on water, Peter walking on water, strong winds, and the lesson ends with the confession, "Truly you are the Son of God."

In ancient writings, turbulent water symbolizes human chaos and calamity. Remember the stories of Noah and the flood, and Jonah and the Whale and the Israelites escaping from the Egyptians?

And wind is often associated with spiritual forces. And that wind can be either good or bad, depending on the context... In this story it is a strong wind creating fear.

Water and strong wind together are a “double-whammy...” If you’ve ever been in a little boat in a big storm, you know what I’m talking about. It’s scary! This storm is a metaphor for uncontrolled human chaos and violence...

As Jesus walks on the water in our story, one very important meaning is that Jesus does not sink amidst the storms of human violence, but rather transforms the human violence. Jesus catches Peter, and brings him into the safety of the boat. And the strong winds cease.

What I’d like to do today, is do some reflecting on how we experience Jesus as that transforming presence, calming those human storms.

This seems very appropriate to talk about because we’re in a very chaotic time right now, aren’t we? We’re not only dealing with the corona virus, which is chaos and a storm in and of itself, we’re also dealing with the human side of that.

We’re dealing with all the finger pointing, the blaming, the accusing, the name calling, the demonizing... And directly in this particular context, we also have the racial tensions and protesting... And everyone violently claiming that the other side is violent. And on top of all that, we also have an election year... Oh Joy!

So, I think we all know, we are currently living in a great human storm!

Quick history lesson, and I know I’ve shared this story before, but it bears repeating...

In 1808 French military leader, Napoleon invaded south into the Iberian Peninsula, what is now Spain, in what is known as the Peninsular Wars. He came upon two villages that hated each other. They had been at war with each other for hundreds of years. They despised each other.

Napoleon noticed their mutual animosity and made his army visible to both villages, but didn't attack them.

Interestingly, instead of the two villages working together to defend themselves against a common enemy, their hatred for each other intensified—apparently, they blamed each other for the invaders. And the two villages virtually killed each other off. Napoleon watched from the sidelines and when he was tired of waiting, he just waltzed in and took over without any resistance.

Ultimately, these two villages would rather die than work together. Rivals can become so “locked-in” to their hatred that they lose all perspective. My favorite thinker, Rene Girard, calls this “An escalation to the extremes...” We vilify each other to the point that we all look like monsters to each other.

And I wonder... are we as a country running directly into this escalation of extremes? This locked-in, unchecked violence toward one another? A passion to be so right, that we lose all perspective? And it feels helpless, like we're being tossed about in a big storm...

Let's be honest, this is a scary stuff... This is real... This is a human storm... It's all of us together with all our covetous wants in conflict with one another... And unless we transform it, it will consume us...

The good news this morning is that Jesus walks on water. Jesus opens our eyes to see our own participation in the violence. And change happens!

Jesus became the victim of all of our human jealousies, covetousness, anger, hatred... Like John the Baptist being be-headed, Jesus died in the violent storm that is oh, so, human. Jesus was crucified on a cross.

And God raised him from the dead to give us a mirror into our stormy and chaotic ways... And when we can see Jesus' blood on our own hands, repentance happens... Change and transformation happens.

Through that lens, we are God's new creation. We are a community shaped around a crucified and risen savior. We don't crucify others to get what we want; we crucify ourselves to understand and serve others. And when we do that, like Peter, we walk on water too.

This is about Republicans and Democrats loving each other... This is about Lutherans and Catholics loving each other... This is about people who watch CNN and FOX loving each other... Do you see the direction? This is not easy stuff, and either is walking on water...

I've got a new idea for a bumper sticker, how about-- "Love your neighbor, walk on water."

And through all this turbulence, Jesus is always there to take our hand. Jesus knows exactly what it's like to be caught in that storm of human chaos and violence. Jesus knows exactly what it's like to be ridiculed, accused, diminished, discarded...

Like so many of you, the more trying these times get, the more glued to God I become. Jesus is always right there to catch our hand and bring us into the boat, in safety and security. And that gives me comfort... No matter how bad anything can get, Jesus is our rock and foundation...

Let's remember Jesus, let's be loving, kind and gracious. Let's make a difference in this world... Because frankly, it needs us... Now, as much as ever before...  
Amen.