

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Pentecost 4

Job 38:1-11, Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22, Mark 4:35-41

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Salem, Bridgeport

“Adventures with Jesus”

Do you remember those Highlight magazines
in which there was a picture in which you had to find hidden things?
Well today’s gospel is kind of like that.
There are some hidden things in the story – some very strange things in the story.

Anything in the story strike anyone here as really weird or strange?
Any sailor here notice anything strange?
OK. Well it took a sailor to point out the strange things in the story to me.

And the first is that Jesus asked his disciples to go across the lake. Across.
You see the thing is that sailors, or at least sailors back in those times in that culture
never went across the lake –
because if you went across the lake you could get caught in a storm,
and your boat might capsize and you could drown and your body could be lost.
And for Jews there was no worse fate.
So you never sailed across the lake; you always sailed around the lake.
You sailed near to the shore, hugging it,
never too far out that you could not come back quickly if the weather changed.
So the first strange thing was that Jesus asked them to sail across the lake.

And now for the second strange thing.
It was evening. That means the sun had gone down and it was getting dark.
Not only did you not sail across the lake, you never sailed in the dark.
Perhaps if there was a full moon and stars you might be able to see a little,
but since a storm comes up there was probably no moon or stars that night.
So Jesus asked them to sail across the lake, in the dark,
to get to the opposite place from where they were.

That just boggles my mind.
As soon as someone pointed that out in the text, I couldn’t stop thinking about it.
It’s a crazy thing that Jesus asked them to do.
It wasn’t rational; it wasn’t reasonable; it wasn’t logical.
It was risky; it was unsafe; it was not very wise.
And yet Jesus asked them to do it.

The next strange part of the story is that they did it!
Now remember that Jesus was not a fisherman, nor was he a sailor.
But probably at least half of his group of disciples
were fishermen, sailors, professional seamen.
They knew not to sail across the lake; they knew not to sail at night,
and yet when Jesus asked them to do it –
Jesus who was not a fisherman nor a sailor nor a professional seaman – they did it!

Why???

Well perhaps because they had seen Jesus perform miraculous healings and other miracles,
they assumed that they could trust him to keep them safe.

You would think, wouldn't you, that if Jesus asked you to do something, you'd be safe?
But no.

As soon as they get out into the middle of the lake, we read that a great storm arose.
But that's not actually what the Greek word means;
the Greek word is better translated hurricane!

So they do what Jesus asked them to do –
this crazy thing of going across the lake at night – and they run into a hurricane!

The boat is being tossed to and fro, the wind is blowing like crazy,
and the waves are washing into the boat and filling it and it's almost ready to sink.
This group of disciples – half of whom are fishermen and half of whom are not –
are not just anxious or afraid. They are terrified. They are afraid for their lives.

And they rouse Jesus who is SLEEPING
through a hurricane that's about to swamp the boat and end their lives
and they ask him why he doesn't care.
He rebukes the wind, he calms the sea, and then he rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith.

So what does the story have to say to us today?

Well first of all I think it's a story that speaks to each of us on an individual level,
and second of all I think it speaks to us as a group –
both as a congregation and as part of the larger church.
Because you will also note that it was not just the one boat with Jesus in it
that was traveling across the lake; there were other boats following as well.

So what is the message?

It seems to me that the first thing is
that we are called to head to a place opposite of where we are.
If you think about our lives as a journey we're always supposed to be moving forward;
we're always supposed to be growing;
we're always supposed to be learning;
we're always supposed to be changing.
And if we look at where we are at this moment
and where we are supposed to be at the end of our lives,
my guess is that God wants us to be a lot farther along in our faith journey than we are.
So wherever we are now, I believe God has so much more in store for us,
but we have to be willing to go across the lake to go to the opposite side of the lake to get it.

Second, Jesus calls us to go across the lake – not around it.
We're not supposed to hug the shore;
we're not supposed to sail close to the things that are familiar to us;
we're not supposed to depend on the landmarks we're used to.
Instead, Jesus calls us to go out into the deep away from what were used to,
to go to a place that's risky, to a place we haven't been before.

Why?

I think the answer is two-fold.

Jesus wants us to go across because there's an urgency.

We no longer have time to sail around; we need to go across.

And I also think that it's about faith.

If we sail where we have always sailed

and see the things that we have always seen,

and do things the way we've always done them, that doesn't take any faith.

To go where we haven't been, to go where there are no landmarks, to go where there is risk
requires us to put our faith not in ourselves but in Jesus.

Third, Jesus asks us to go at a time when we can't see where we're going or what's ahead.

There is no clarity, no light, nothing that they can see with our human eyes.

We are called to take a risky journey in the dark

because that's the only way we will have to rely on Jesus.

Over and over in the Bible God asks people to do ridiculous things.

God asked Abraham to pick up and move his family, his slaves, his whole entourage,

his flocks and everything he owned at the age of 75

and move to a place that God would show him.

God called Moses who stuttered to persuade Pharaoh to let his people go.

God called a young shepherd boy named David to fight a giant named Goliath.

God kept cutting down Gideon's army to a ridiculously small number of men.

God called the most fervent hater of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, to spread the gospel.

In our first lesson today, when Job dares to question God,

God reminds Job that his tiny little rational mind

cannot even begin to understand the mind of God!

From the beginning, from Adam & Eve, we humans have wanted to control our own lives.
We want to decide where we go, and when we go and how we get there,
but that's not what the life of faith is about.

Today's gospel reminds us that faith is not a rational or reasonable or logical thing.
Jesus asked his disciples then and he asks us now to go to the other side,
to go across the lake, and to go in the dark.

And even when we trust him enough to go, there's no guarantee we will not encounter storms.

So what does this mean in practical terms?

Well in terms of your individual faith journey, that's something for you to figure out with God –
perhaps through prayer, perhaps through scripture,
perhaps through talking with a friend with whom you can talk about faith,
perhaps through talking with me.

In terms of our life together, it will also take prayer and reflection on God's word.
But it will also take imagination.

At the Council of Churches worship service on Thursday,
the Reverend Alida Ward shared a story about a game she played as a child –
a game involving a magic closet.

At her cousins' house there was a closet with sliding doors
and she and her cousins would open one door, go in, shut the door,
and then dream and imagine and fantasize about what would greet them on the outside
when they exited the other door.

They were filled with excitement & hope & joy as they envisioned all of the possibilities!
And when they opened the other door and came out they were in the land of their dreams.

Getting into the boat at night with Jesus to cross the lake to a place opposite of where they were,
it's a lot like stepping into a closet with Jesus
and imagining and dreaming and envisioning with him
where he wants us to go and what he wants us to do.

One thing is sure: Jesus does not want us to stay where we are,
doing what we've been doing.

Jesus asks us to get in the boat and go on an adventure of faith,
to go out into the deep water to where we have never gone before,
in a way that is risky, and to do it without being able to see.

I invite you to get into the closet with Jesus this week
and start imagining and dreaming and envisioning where God is calling us
in terms of worship, in terms of learning, in terms of serving,
in terms of witnessing to our faith,
and in terms of stewarding our resources of time and talent and treasure.

The life of faith is as scary as being in a hurricane in the middle of the lake in the middle of the night.
But it's also the most exciting and rewarding and fulfilling thing we can ever do.

I hope this story impresses itself as deeply upon your heart and mind and soul as it did on mine.
May God give us the courage to get in the boat and set sail with Jesus
as the wind of the Spirit blows us where God wills. Amen!