

Crossing Over to the Other Side  
Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; Mark 4:35-41  
July 11, 2021

I want to talk today about crossing over to the other side. This crossing does not occur only on the Lake of Galilee. It occurs also in each of our lives. With Jesus, it is always about the other side. Has he asked you to go to the other side lately? It was that way for the disciples.

They were about to bed down and get comfortable for the evening after working hard all day. They were ready to put up the tent, kick back and tell fishing stories for the rest of the evening. But Jesus wasn't ready to rest. He was stirring through the camp. Finally, just when they were getting comfortable for the night, Jesus said, "Let's cross over to the other side."

Jesus never allows us to get too comfortable when it comes to our lives and our habits. In Matthew's version of the same story, (14:22) Jesus tells the disciples to go over to the other side of the lake and meets them halfway across, walking on the water. But here in Mark's version, they're all in the same boat.

Every fisherman worth their salt in that day knew that the lake was most likely to have storms during the evening and nightfall. There is a reason for that. When the cool winds from the hills north of Galilee blow down, and mix with the warm air that comes in from the Mediterranean Sea, that combination of warm and cool air has a way of setting off some very bad storms in a short time.

I knew something about frequent thunderstorms while living in New Jersey! They came out of nowhere. That's exactly what happened that night. There they were -- out in the middle of the lake in the middle of the night -- pitch black -- still far from the other side, yet too far from the shore to turn back.

Mark says, "A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped" with water. Mk 4:37 This was no ordinary storm. These disciples were professional fishermen who had spent most of their lives in boats on this lake. They had survived many storms, and knew when it was dangerous and when it was not.

They were alarmed. They could tell that the wind and the waves were too much for their small boat. They were afraid for their lives. In their fear they sought Jesus. But where was he? Had he gotten swept overboard? Did he desert them and walk away on the waves just as he came to them in Matthew's gospel?

Just when their panic reached its highest point and they feared for their lives, someone found Jesus. There he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion! Asleep! Can you imagine? The disciples woke him up -- "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mk 4:38) As soon as Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the waves, and he said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Immediately the wind ceased, and everything was calm. Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mk 4:40) Mark tells us that the disciples were filled with great awe, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41) It had been quite a night.

The wind and the storms at sea were not the only turbulence the disciples were facing. At the time that Mark wrote his Gospel, the disciples were struggling with storms of a different kind—but with the same kind of fear. In the early years of the Christian movement, Christians experienced lots of hardships—lots of persecution. Christians were subjected to all kinds of torture and death because of their faith.

It isn't hard to imagine how those early Christians felt during times of persecution. They must have prayed, and cried out again: "Jesus, do you not care that we are perishing?" "Help us! Save us! Do something!" Those prayers were straight from the heart -- no holds barred.

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What about us? We have probably spent most of our time on land -- on the shore -- with our feet on the ground . . . in broad daylight so we can see where we're going, or at night at least with the benefit of a flashlight at night. We know more or less what to expect. We don't like surprises. But sooner or later in life, we find ourselves in the boat with Jesus and the disciples as in today's Gospel story.

We can relate to the disciples. Maybe you have even called out to Jesus like the disciples did: "Master, do you not care that I am perishing? Do you not care that my loved one is perishing, or my life is falling apart? Don't you know the kind of pain I'm in?"

Sometimes the most honest prayer is the heartfelt prayer when you just blurt it out to God without thinking . . . when you don't stop to choose your words carefully -- you just put in out there in the moment like the disciples did. That's what makes this such a great story from Mark's gospel.

You might be in the midst of a storm right now—some sort of health problem—or relationship problem—or financial problem. Perhaps a son or daughter needs help. We invite you to submit your prayer requests every week so we can pray as a body for those challenges. Julie does a wonderful job sending out the prayer chair every week.

When it comes to any need we might have, the thing I am always mindful of is that while we might be venturing out in a stormy, stressful world where we don't know

what's next, we *can* know that we are not alone. Sometimes I think the fear of the unknown is much worse than any news we might receive. At least we would know what to plan. But Jesus is always there with us. We shouldn't be surprised.

Nothing has changed since those days on the stormy sea with the disciples. What does seem to surprise many people is his response when the disciples asked him a question. Do you remember what it was? "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He says the same thing to us today that he said to the disciples.

Before he says anything at all, he acts as only the Lord himself can. After he wakes up, Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves, and he says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a instant calm. (4:39) He said to the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (4:40) They didn't know what to say. They were speechless.

What would you say? Have you ever been surprised at how Jesus answered your prayer? The first part of his question might have been perceived as an insult by the disciples. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" We can almost hear the disciples talking amongst themselves: "Are you kidding Jesus? Do you not know what is happening here? We are drowning! We're afraid for our lives!" Yet they had just seen Jesus still the storm, and reduce the water to a dead calm. When he scolded them for their shallow faith, they were awe-struck: "Who is this?" they asked each other, clearly astonished. "Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

It took some time and much experience for them to begin to comprehend what had happened. That they were slow to learn and believe ought to be a comfort to us. The one thing you can be sure of is that Jesus has immense patience with us—probably more than he had even for those first disciples, if that is possible.

Today, tomorrow, next month or next year, you will find yourself "crossing over" some deep boundary or unknown destination. You will have to make a decision without knowing all the facts, or take a leap of faith. The very nature of the unknown is enough to make most people anxious and afraid.

Fortunately, we never travel alone, and our traveling companion can sleep through storms not because he is indifferent, but because he is in control. Even the wind and the waves recognize him and obey his commands. He ought to have what it takes to calm an anxious mind or trembling heart. That's the kind of pilot and captain I want to be with. How about you? He brings to us today the same gift he brought to the disciples if we are willing to receive it. Jesus brings serenity. He brings a calm and a non-anxious presence. Don't let the fear of the unknown overwhelm you.

When I'm feeling a bit anxious about the future, I try to do some yoga and deep breathing. A little stretching and meditation goes a long way. In fact, it's better to do it before you face uncertainty or trepidation. A lifelong habit of contemplative prayer helps you to keep centered and focused. With Jesus there is calm and peace in the eye of the storm. His gift to us is that same quiet confidence and faith.

Sometimes, the Lord answers our prayers in the way we desire. Sometimes we pray to recover from an illness, and we recover. Sometimes we pray for a relationship to be restored, and it is. But at other times, the Lord helps us in another way. Sometimes, the Lord makes it possible for us to live joyful, productive lives in spite of the storms raging around us and within us. Someone put it this way:

"Sometimes the Lord calms the storm, and sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms the believer!" You can't do anything about the storms and stresses that come your way in life, but you *can* choose how you respond. Personally, when I'm faced with an important decision, I take a long walk, and things have a way of working themselves out.

Jesus is always in the boat with us, but like the disciples, sometimes we can't find him, though he is there in the boat the entire time. It was no accident that from very early on in the history of the Christian Church, some crosses were shaped to look like an anchor. The idea was that Jesus is our anchor in life. Similarly, the ceilings of many of the great cathedrals across Europe were designed in the shape of an upside down boat. Some feel it was in reference to this story of Jesus in the boat, commanding calm on a turbulent sea.

No matter what stormy winds might come against us, no matter what kinds of trouble might enter our lives, we can trust that Jesus won't let us get swept away. Take a few moments to pray. Make it a daily habit. It helps keep you from getting swept overboard.

For Jesus, a simple command brought peace and calm -- something the disciples desperately needed. He brings that same deep peace today to you and me. Through uncertain times and dangerous storms, Jesus is with us. He is at peace when we are troubled, and in control when we are not. We're all in the same boat, but we're not alone. Make sure he is with you whenever you cross over to the other side, wherever it may be. Amen

Psalm 107:1-3; 23-32

- <sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.
- <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—  
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,  
<sup>3</sup> those he gathered from the lands,  
from east and west, from north and south.<sup>[a]</sup>
- <sup>23</sup> Some went out on the sea in ships;  
they were merchants on the mighty waters.
- <sup>24</sup> They saw the works of the LORD,  
his wonderful deeds in the deep.
- <sup>25</sup> For he spoke and stirred up a tempest  
that lifted high the waves.
- <sup>26</sup> They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;  
in their peril their courage melted away.
- <sup>27</sup> They reeled and staggered like drunkards;  
they were at their wits' end.
- <sup>28</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he brought them out of their distress.
- <sup>29</sup> He stilled the storm to a whisper;  
the waves of the sea<sup>[a]</sup> were hushed.
- <sup>30</sup> They were glad when it grew calm,  
and he guided them to their desired haven.
- <sup>31</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
- <sup>32</sup> Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people  
and praise him in the council of the elders.

Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Calms the Storm

- <sup>35</sup> That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” <sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”
- <sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.
- <sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”
- <sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”