

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster

Sunday, August 13th, 2023, Pentecost 11

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45c Romans 10:5-15 Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus goes up on the mountain alone to pray when the disciples get into trouble in a boat on the water. Let's put it in a bit of a cultural context. The Jews were not a seafaring people. To say they had a healthy respect for water would be a bit of an understatement.

So here they are in a boat with big waves. Jesus comes to them and says you of little faith why do you doubt?

I remember as a preteen being at our cottage in northern Quebec and a group of us kids on an island not far from shore having a picnic lunch. A storm came up and the fathers organized boats with ropes to bring us back to shore. I remember the incident, but I don't remember being scared. Maybe I didn't realize the danger and felt the island was so close to shore there wasn't the problem the parents thought there was.

Perhaps it's not so much the amount of faith but the type of faith. It's difficult to quantify the amount of faith but our understanding about what faith is about. It's not just about saying what we believe but how we live our lives. In a very real way faith and trust go together.

This reminds me the parable a few weeks ago of the Sower and the seed and the different kinds of ground. It's as if the disciples our modeling being on rocky ground or thorns and the problems of life taking their faith away. The storms of life.

I am wondering if the disciples, not being a seafaring people, didn't know how to react to being in the storm, and didn't have any plan to help whether the storm. They would have had a feeling of hopelessness, which would bring about doubt and questioning whether God is there or not.

Maybe our first reaction when we find ourselves in one of the storms of life is to pray and make a point of giving it all over to God. But there is the reality that we are not passive bystanders in our own lives but have an active part to play. So, it's not just a matter of throwing up our hands and waiting for God to bail us out. I remember on the same lake a canoe was washed up on the beach club beach, and the club from down the lake came in canoes to return the canoe. The waves were still quite high, and when they came past our cottage they didn't come straight across, otherwise they would have swamped, the waves hitting the side of the canoe. Instead, they faced into and away from the waves most of the time. It took longer and travelling farther to get where they wanted to go.

And the good news, there lack of faith didn't cause them to walk away from Jesus, but to continue to follow him.

I know I said I wasn't afraid when I was younger, but I can understand the disciples' reaction. In every situation I might react the same way. But is it the end of the story? Did the disciples question how they felt after thinking back on the incident? Did they reconnect to their faith and gave thanks to Jesus later?

I remember being upset when three years ago during COVID when my car broke down coming back into Campbellford. And I had to buy the new car. I could end the story there, the same way the story of the storm ends today but you want to hear the rest.

The car broke down very close to Campbellford. And I was able to walk to the car dealership to find and buy a car. The car I now have it's better for driving on the 407, and it would been a lot worse if the car had broken down on the 407 instead of near Campbellford.

I came across something the other day that was very interesting. A woman giving a talk about why some people succeed and others don't. We think of such things as good looks background education and intelligence as the significant factors in success. She looked at cadets at West Point, and students in a high school in Chicago. Trying to predict who would succeed and graduate and who would not. The factor which seemed the most important was either grit or perseverance. There are those who succeed who do not articulate any sense of faith, but faith in God in Christ can give us the confidence and be a foundation for the grit or perseverance to get us through the challenges and storms of life.

Maybe what Jesus is saying you of little faith why do you doubt? Why have you given up so soon? Where is the grit and perseverance which comes with the faith I have and I'm offering you?

Amen

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet
walk with you on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands
stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart
open your hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ in ev'ryone you meet,

And may ev'ryone you meet see the face of Christ in you. Amen.