

For just a moment let us remind ourselves of all that has been happening in the life and ministry of Jesus and the disciples in the lead up to the incident described in today's reading in the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus has heard that John the Baptist was executed by Herod in a particularly violent and nasty manner, designed to get maximum publicity on the Nancy Grace Show & in the Tabloid Press. John had been preaching and teaching his message of repentance and faith to all who would listen, he had travelled across Galilee carrying on the mission God had given to him. As part of this mission, John took on the "powers that be" identifying Herod's guilt and excess. The result? John paid with his life.

It is no stretch at all to imagine that Jesus must have wondered if He would be Herod's next victim. Jesus would have seen the posters: HEROD'S TEN MOST WANTED PREACHERS. They were plastered everywhere, a stark warning to any preacher not to comment on Herod's person or activities.

Likewise, the disciples of Jesus must have wondered if this would be the fate of their Master because they knew that Jesus was prone to comment on the tough stuff and never shrank from pushing back against the authorities, political or religious. And if what happened to John happened to Jesus, what about them? At the very least, they would lose their friend and teacher; at worst maybe they would also see the inside of Herod's prison or feel his blade on their necks!

No wonder then that Jesus had sought some solitude when news reached Him of Herod's murderous actions. Jesus' plan was foiled when the crowds, likewise alarmed over John's death, sought out Jesus for comfort and healing. The picnic by the lakeside, when 5,000 plus were fed was a welcome respite and a sheer delight compared to the other goings on. The giving, sharing and receiving of food for and by the masses expressed for Jesus, for the disciples, and for the crowd what really mattered and what true Kingship looked like, loaves and fishes style, where all were truly and fully welcome – all fed and satisfied, Jesus' style!

Having once again extended His love and life and laughter to and with and for the crowds, Jesus still needs that time apart He had been seeking. Just in case this was to be the hour of His death!

And so as we enter into today's reading Jesus and the disciples, each and all have a whole bunch of stuff running through their heads, gnawing away at them in the pit of their stomachs, agitating them in their inner beings. As the disciples look to cross the Lake in a boat, leaving Jesus to have His alone time, they sure wish Jesus was with them, for they have questions to ask and they would like some answers as to the meaning of everything that they have just seen and heard. The disciples are in the boat and the disciples are in a real tizzy! And Jesus, as He comes to be with the disciples, is likewise discombobulated! They are all in the midst of a real and a big storm, a real and a big storm of fear and uncertainty, knocking them this way and that, buffeting them in their sense of call from God, a storm that they could not avoid, and which was terrifying, overwhelming, unending, impenetrable, inescapable! All the more remarkable since some of them had grown up sailing this very lake, but somehow this was a place and a storm and an experience unlike anything they had previously seen.

And so, the Gospel writer tells us how the weather and the sea conditions and their effect, match the mood and experience of both Jesus and the disciples. The elements and the combination of the elements, wind and waves, all reflect, express and increase the inner turmoil being felt by the disciples and by Jesus and

yet, and yet...**it is the storm that throws them together, it is the storm that leads to a reunion and a beginning again.**

My friends, of all the life lessons that we have had this is one we really know: Storms, especially big storms very often throw people together in the deepest, most creative and lasting way. When the crisis comes, those affected and trouble hold together, and are forever marked and changed by the experience, by both the storm and the response to the storm. Those of you who endured Hurricane Hugo together; those folks who climbed on the wing of the plane landed so skillfully in the Hudson River; those who faced combat together or who battled to climb a mountain or extinguish a fire or build a church or deliberately live the lifestyle of Jesus in the face of life's storms, they and we know how much we need one another and how much every other person offers that we cannot offer, we know what it means to hold together, to be in the boat together, to trust our lives to one another.

Some of you know that back in 2005 I spent part of my Sabbatical on the Freedom Schooner Amistad. I should also say that I became a deck hand never having been a sailor. On Amistad I sailed as part of a crew of twelve from Mystic, CT, to Bermuda. What we expected to be a 6-7 day transit turned into 10 days due to severe weather, really severe weather. Standing watch, connected by my safety harness to the lifeline, with water coming in over me and beneath me, with no hot food for several days, it was a wearing, exhausting time, but what took us through the storm was the participation and cooperation of the entire crew and the gifts and skills of the Captain. Different size and style of ship, different body of water, yet same result, the presence and guidance of the Captain and the close partnership within the crew is what takes us forward on board ship, in our family, in our church, in our community. No matter the storms that might surround or capture us from time to time, alongside one another we find the possibilities that would elude us if we were alone and the strength and determination to persist.

This little story about Walking on Water comes from Wisconsin. "Joey had heard a family rumor that his father, his grand-father and even his great-grandfather, all "walked on water" on their 21st birthday. Well today was his 21st birthday and if they could do it, so could he. So, off he went in a boat with a friend. Reaching the middle of the lake, he got up and stepped out of the boat and nearly drowned. The next day, Joey asked his grandmother why he wasn't given the same gift as the others in his family. The grandmother told him that his father, grand-father and great-grandfather had all been born in February, not in August like he was."

It is a fun little story and in part I tell it to point out that the text of the Gospel of Matthew we are not told that Jesus walked on the water! We are told that Jesus came to the disciples walking "on the sea." From the Book of Genesis to the Revelation of St. John, from first to last in the Bible in Hebrew thought, "the sea" means chaos, confusion. Creation brought order to this chaos, but the seas were always disorderly, and as such were signs and symbols of creation not yet completed and tamed. In the Book of Revelation's New Jerusalem, that is to come down from God to earth, there is to be no sea, for since all things are to be fully and finally renewed, the chaotic, the incomplete can no longer exist, there is to be no more sea.

Jesus comes to us disciples, walking on the sea, demonstrating to us that chaos, disorder, turmoil, cannot ever prevent or forbid Jesus from engaging with all those who are in the storm with Him. Jesus comes walking on the sea, fear and threats, blame and sin, not even death can stop Him, God will make a way where no way first exists. Jesus comes to us through and in the chaos and into the chaos to take hold of us and to never ever let us go.

Jesus comes walking on the sea. In framing his partial response, Peter does use the word “water” as he negotiates whether or not he might join his Master. To me this indicates that Peter was more caught up in the moment than in its true meaning. As ever, Jesus is inclined to allow His disciples to take the plunge and learn for themselves, but the point of this story must never be restricted to what Peter did or how he ended up, wet and wilting. The point of the story was and is the faithful recognition by Peter and all in the boat of the real identity of Jesus, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

The need for clarity over Jesus’ identity as the Son of God is a thread throughout the Gospel of Matthew. In Chapter 4, in the wilderness, the tempter asks or suggests, “IF you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread and eat.” Here in Ch. 14, once everyone is on board in the boat with Jesus, the disciples gladly and joyfully affirm Jesus as Son of God. These same disciples, led again by Peter will re-affirm this trust once again in Ch. 16 led by Peter’s declaration at Caesarea Philippi. In Ch. 27 following Jesus’ death it will be a Roman centurion who will repeat the refrain, “Truly this man was God’s Son.” This is what Jesus has been aiming for all along; this is what the disciples have been hoping for, that others, outside of their little band, and others even outside of the Jewish community, even a Gentile, a Roman soldier, in this most Jewish of Gospels, would come to know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God!

I suggest that we look to receive this story and apply its implications in **two ways today**.

Firstly, as we reflect on our calling as a church to reflect God as we engage in OUTREACH as part of our life, we might hear again Jesus call us to enter into the chaos and disorder of real life.

OUTREACH asks us to be willing to come alongside those who are facing life’s storm: the poor, the vulnerable, the weak, the overlooked, the underserved, the unwanted. Such OUTREACH after the manner of Jesus is not about claiming that we are perfect or that we have our lives together or that people need to follow our example. Engagement in such OUTREACH requires us to ask hard questions of powerful people. Feeding the hungry invites us to ask why people lack food and where the required resources are and what the correct balance of response should be from government and society as a whole as well as from people of faith and compassion. Housing the homeless invites us to ask how and when and where low cost affordable housing will be available for those who need it. Mentoring the family gripped by debt or addiction invites us to question the false claims of consumerism. Our OUTREACH can never be about making us feel better or good or less guilty, it is all about the people we serve and the Savior who calls us to such service.

Secondly, as we gather around the Lord’s Table today this Scripture promises us that the Lord who meets us here is the One who offers us the nearest experience of God, the deepest sense of welcome, the most tender love, the most passionate engagement, the most complete forgiveness, the most all-embracing call to shared faith and service. “Lord, Save Me!” Peter cried, as he sensed that he was about to be lost. “Lord, Save Me!” should be our cry today as we come to receive the body and blood of our Lord. “Lord, Save Me” “Lord, Save Us” especially at this Table we know that we cannot ever save ourselves, not one of us. Instead all we can do is throw ourselves on the love and mercy and grace of God, who always, always, always meets us and says to all of us, in the boat or in the sea, “Come!” “Come!” “Come!” Come, receive and share my love for you now and ever. “Come!” Amen.