

And He got into the boat with them, & the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded...

GETTIN' INTO THE BOAT

There was a man named Ole living over in Minnesota. Now Ole was a man who loved to go fishin, so he thought he should have his own boat. And not just some little rubber ducky boat; he wanted a real fishing boat, the kind with an inboard motor & a cabin below decks. But every time he asked his wife Lena if he could buy one, she told him, “No!”

Finally, Ole couldn't stand it any longer, so he bought himself a boat anyway. When Lena found out & confronted Ole, he told her, “In the spirit of compromise, I will allow you to name the boat.” Being a good sport, she accepted his offer. When Ole went to the dock to begin his maiden voyage, this is the name he saw painted on the side: - - - - - “For Sale.” **PAUSE**

So what do you think, did Ole's wife Lena ever get in to that boat? And what about us, are we willing to get into the boat even if we have every right to refuse? Ole was clearly wrong, spending the money he did without first gaining his wife's agreement. Yet, if there's an argument, & you're the one who's right, doesn't pride tend to inflate your ego?

It takes little effort to cast the 1st stone. Being part of the solution takes a lot more time & energy. Do any of us need more to do these days? Maybe your spouse hasn't brought home a boat, but has committed you to something without asking first. Or, frustration has gotten out of control & things were said that shouldn't have been. Has your trust ever been betrayed?

Even though all of us are sinful finding ourselves in the position of being the one who's right isn't all that uncommon. Eventually, everyone stumbles into that position now & then. The struggle is in what to do with it. Being right & handling it in a godly way is just as difficult as being wrong & handling that in a godly way. In either case humility can end up in short supply. Did Lena ever get into the boat that Ole bought without her agreement? And what about us, have we ever gotten into the boat? If we have, what was our motive in doing so? That's the question for this morning's meditation.

In today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, as Jesus got into the boat the wind ceased & His disciples were utterly astounded. When they first noticed Him walking on the water they thought He was a ghost & were terrified. Mark explains the reason behind their fears, “...for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”

You see, the story right before this one is the feeding of the 5000, which we heard in last Sunday's Gospel reading. Mark comments that Jesus' disciples didn't understand it, & for the same reason they're also afraid & astounded with Jesus' actions in today's portion of the Gospel.

They physically saw Jesus feed 5000 men with only five loaves of bread & two fish. Obviously it was a miracle. What could they have missed? What could their hardened hearts have prevented them from understanding? And where does your heart, & mine, fit into that lesson? **PAUSE**

“Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat & go before Him to the other side...” The impact of that sentence is lost if you don't grasp the context of this story. The 5000 had finished eating & were being sent home just before sundown. By the time Jesus is seen striding across the waves the disciples are still battling against the wind out in the lake.

Mark had written that about the 4th watch of the night is when Jesus appears, that means sometime after 3:00 AM. They'd been rowing for at least 5 hours & the distance they were going should have made it an hour or two at most. Yet, knowing this storm was coming, Jesus had sent them into the boat to "go before Him to the other side."

The physical struggle His disciples were facing was not because of their lack of faith. It was because Jesus sent them into it. Now, several of the disciples were experienced fishermen so this challenge certainly was not beyond them, & Mark makes no mention of fear until the 'ghost.' Adding credence to the theory that they were seeing a 'ghost' is that stormy seas were thought to be the realm of demons & such.

The struggle Jesus sent them into was not to be a physical one. Their master had designed for them a spiritual test. And, as the text makes clear, Jesus had not intended to get into the boat. As He was striding across the sea, "He meant to pass by them." If they'd understood the feeding of the 5000 they'd have realized that God Himself was personally with them.

Jesus' walking on the sea was supposed to be another demonstration of that, & the OT repeatedly proclaimed Yahweh's power over the seas & rivers, the storms & the wind. If the disciples knew their Scriptures, & if they had faith in Jesus as Savior, they wouldn't have become terrified, thinking they'd seen a ghost. They'd have been encouraged because God is with us.

This episode is a good illustration of the life of discipleship as a constant experience of testing & deliverance. It was not through stubborn self-will, but through direct obedience to the Lord's command, that the disciples found themselves in this predicament. But if they'd trusted in Jesus as the Son of God, it would not have been terrifying. It would've been uplifting.

Yet, though His disciples failed the test, Jesus didn't abandon them. Because of His gracious & merciful nature He changes His plan, & He gets in the boat. So there are two messages for us in this story. The 1st is that Jesus is God & He is with us, we can stop being afraid. The 2nd is that Jesus is gracious & merciful even when we flunk the 1st lesson.

How many of you are uncomfortable with visiting someone in the hospital? How many get nervous when going to a viewing at a funeral home? Isn't part of the problem the fact that we just aren't sure what to say? Research shows however, that patients in the hospital, & family members at the funeral home, are not expecting us to say any particular thing. They simply value our presence with them. They only want for us to get into boat with them, because that's what Jesus does. He got into the boat with us when He was conceived in the virgin Mary's womb. He got into the boat with His disciples when they thought they saw a ghost.

Jesus got into the boat for us, & without us, when He endured hell as His Father forsook Him on the cross. Jesus gets into the boat because He loves you, & because He loves me. And by the power of God's Holy Spirit each one of us is able to get into the boat with our neighbor as they endure the struggles of living in a sinful world.

Even when we have every right to be angry with them the power is there for us to get into their boat with them instead, because Jesus got into our boat first. Because of our sins the Son of God had every right to cast the 1st stone, but He didn't because He knew that wouldn't save us. And Jesus desperately wants you & me to know that He has already saved us.

If we believe that we shall not perish but have eternal life. That's why He tests us, so that we see the truth. If you never take a test in math class how do you know that you've learned anything? The exam is meant to prove what you've gained through your study. The trials of life are meant to prove what we've gained through Jesus Christ.

When you are right, & someone else is wrong, there is another option besides throwing stones. Because the God of all creation has gotten into the boat with you, & with all of your

failures, you too can get into the boat of your neighbor in their failures, in their disappointments, & in their sorrows. Simply your presence will say more than a thousand words.

Jesus doesn't have to get into the boat here with us this morning, but He chooses to because He knows the only way we can be saved is to have our sins forgiven. Earlier I said that all of us occasionally stumble into the position of being right, but truthfully, those times are not accidents. God arranges even those circumstances to test us, giving you & me opportunities to refrain from casting stones, but to get into someone else's boat instead, that they might know of God's love for them through your willingness to forgive. Have you shared that life giving news with anyone lately, that you have forgiven their sins as Jesus has forgiven yours?

When you do the opportunity is there for them to know that Yahweh is not some ghost walking through the storms of life to frighten them, but that He is with them, in the boat of their struggles & suffering. He is with them to erase their failures & sins. He is with them to lift them up & bring encouragement. He is with them that they might be still & know that He is God.

In this morning's reading from Genesis the rainbow is a sign, & a promise, of God's presence with Noah & his family. All through the long days of the flood Yahweh was present with them, on the ark, & He would continue to be with, never again to destroy the world with a flood. Instead, God would send His Son to carry their sins.

The only godly motive for getting into another person's boat, full as it is with sin, is because Jesus first got into our boat & rescued us. It's true, our sinful nature would like to see them suffer for their wrongs, but Jesus put our sinful nature to death at Golgotha. Thanks be to God for His grace & mercy in setting us free from our sinful nature. Amen.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea & rides upon the storm. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence faith sees a smiling face. You fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy & will break in blessings upon your head. Amen.