

Meditation: Luke 8:22-25

April 6, 2009

²² One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. ²³As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵"Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

I chose this passage for a meditation this week because I was looking for a message relevant to the time and place we find ourselves this evening at the end of the LLWL's course, as disciples of Jesus "setting out" on a journey "towards the other shore." We, like the disciples, seek to accompany Jesus wherever he goes and to be faithful to that call to join him – a call that may lead, unexpectedly, to danger.

Perhaps that was NOT you're first thought in contemplating leadership as a _____! Perhaps you, like the disciples, were looking forward to smooth sailing, or at least a calm trip; with Jesus by your side – or in your boat. In our deepest selves we often assume safety with God by our side. But the scripture is clear – to follow Jesus is to place ourselves at risk – to be put in situations where we may find ourselves in serious, life-threatening danger! Hmm...That may be a reason to give pause to the call...

But I imagine that since the disciples were fishermen, (and we are in ministry too) they (we) would have been aware that the Sea of Galilee is a notoriously unpredictable place and those wild storms were frequent occurrences. Many a time before, I imagine the disciples had safely navigated such dangers, perhaps on their own, and may have even become complacent in their routines.

I have been reading a book this week by Barry Robinson entitled "Lucifer Grows in our Garden – An Anatomy of Clergy Abuse". Barry was at one time, for 30years, a "successful" United Church minister, until he encountered life-threatening dangers at sea.

The book is an account of that fateful journey and a picture of the shore he eventually landed on after his boat capsized. It is an eye-opening exercise for anyone contemplating engaging in ministry to read, as it details many of the evils (read dangers) that exist in the Church today under the guise of "accountable ministry." The author identifies a key source of many a raging storm surrounding those who would seek to follow Jesus "out there" as good old-fashioned envy. Yes, envy. That gave me pause as well.

He states, “There are some people within some congregations and some church leaders acting on behalf of themselves or their communities, who live in envy; and their next victim will probably be a minister of the church...It is relatively easy to spot. First there is the protestation of friendship (admiration, respect = pedestal) Then, the subtle questioning of motive... (Gee, did you notice?) Followed by a hint of secret faults or vices (just an observation, really...) finally, a direct attack on the character (or indirect, depending on sense of vulnerability) When it is all over, there is not much left to poor old G_____... Envy, quite simply, is the evil that takes possession of us when we begin to resent other people for who and what they are.” Pg106-107

In Barry’s case, envy became a wild storm and he almost drowned. In our case, envy is at least one life-threatening danger we will need to contend with within ourselves and between ourselves and others while we navigate through our ministry. (After reading this passage I became aware of my own habitual thinking about a person which was leading in this very direction!) Beware of placing people on pedestals because they have a habit of falling off them and disappointing us! If we are truly secure in ourselves and God’s love for us, there will be no need to compare ourselves, to admire and then secretly critique, to seek the gratification of another’s recognition, to obsessively praise others or just as obsessively bemoan our own failings

As in the Luke passage, something about this storm, and this place and time was different. And this time, the disciples realized the danger placed them in immanent peril; a danger lurking in the background during all their daily work on the sea.

In this passage I am more aware of the dynamic between Jesus and his followers; than I am of the miracle he performed calming the sea and wind. (A miracle Jesus was reportedly quite “matter-of-fact” about) Rather, I think the true miracle is hidden in the unanswered comment in the passage - “Where is your faith?” You see, I do not hear a rebuke in Jesus’ words. Neither do I hear surprise, sarcasm or disappointment. I think that is a human projection we place on Jesus – a projection of our broken image of God.

What I hear is a nudge – a gentle reminder – a compassionate pointing in the direction of ourselves – an acknowledgement by Jesus to the power within us that already exists and is present and accessible within us NOW – what a wonderful thing!! The God of the Universe considers us able, and empowers us – asks us to simply recognize that our power to overcome the dangers “out there” lies within us, not out there commanding the waves to be still, which is a relatively small act compared to the miracle of true faith. The true miracle is when we become believers in the power of God inside us both to make us aware of the real dangers that exist (in ministry today), and also to develop our ability to navigate those waters safely, with Jesus in the boat with us. That journey to the other shore is what we are engaged in now.