

STORMY WATERS

When I was 18 or 19 years old I was down the seashore with my younger brother so he was probably 15 or 16 years old. We loved to sail and we had just pooled out money together to buy a new kind of sailboat that was just starting to be produced and sold called a skylark. It had a modified twin-hull design and a 24 foot long aluminum mast and we loved it. This Saturday afternoon the wind was really blowing and we headed out for a sail. We were not really wise about this decision. Sometimes there is strong wind and sometimes too much wind for your boat. A wise sailor knows which is which.

We were really moving fast and not paying attention either to the fact that all the other boats were getting off the bay or that the skies were becoming more menacing. We were sailing out by the Bay Bridge of the Inland Water Way and I was on the rudder and my brother tending the sails when the rudder itself snapped in half and I went head over teacups into the water and saw my brother thrown into the sail and the boat capsized. I swam to the boat and he was okay but we had to gather the sail and the mast had dislodged and then the boat flipped completely over. We gathered the mast and sail and climbed on board the overturned sailboat and then caught our breath and took stock. There was not a boat to be seen anywhere. We were a couple of miles from shore, sitting on an overturned sailboat with the wind increasing and the rain beginning to pelt us. I was very scared.

Then there came a Barnegat Bay flat-bottomed garvey, an old clam digger returning to dock from his day's work. He threw us a line and we hooked on and slowly he towed us into port. Happy ending. But as he unhooked us and we drifted to shore he told us that we were smart to stay with the boat even upside down. That was our only safety.

I thought of that when I read today's story about Jesus inviting Peter to walk on the Sea of Galilee. Fishermen, like sailors, know that you don't ever get out of the boat in a storm. It is your only safety net. But Peter does. He steps out of his true comfort zone because Jesus asks him too. And because Jesus is doing something that Peter believes can't be done. But as Jesus stands in the water and does not sink Peter and his companions know that there is something happening that doesn't happen but somehow is happening. Is leaving the safety zone part of that experience?

In the Southwestern part of our country in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico you can see many caves in the mountains and hills of the desert. The same is true in the Holy Land. In the southern desert areas there are thousands of caves in the hills and mountains of Judea and there are some that have been inhabited since the time of King David. Some created by nature and others carved out of the limestone by man. Elijah is being relentlessly pursued by the thugs of Queen Jezebel who want to kill him. He takes refuge in one of the caves to hide from their pursuit. It is a time of natural disasters. Earth tremors, Hurricane force winds and lightning strikes which cause forest fires. Elijah seeks refuge. Stay in the cave. Don't leave the cave in the storm or when pursued by your adversaries. The cave is safety. But Elijah, like Peter, is invited to come out of the cave and as he does so he begins to realize that as threatening as the storms and natural disasters are, God is not in any of that. Not in all the powerful displays of nature. It is

only when the forces of nature subside that in the quiet the voice of God can be heard. But Elijah has to leave his place of safety. Just like Peter had to leave his place of safety to experience the hand of God reaching out to him and lifting him from the peril of sinking in the water. We should never be foolhardy or act without thought. But there is a counter intuitive wisdom at times in life, Know when to step out of your place of safety and put your trust in a power greater than your own, in a real spirit of trust. This is true in the decisions we make about what we do with our lives or who to marry or how many children to have or what job to pursue or where to live or how to care for family members or what kind of neighbor or fellow worker I am going to be.

I want to make a suggestion to you that will seem farcical when you first hear it but I believe it to have a grain of truth to it. Your coming here today was your leaving your cave, your place of safety, was your stepping out of your boat and allowing the Lord to speak a word to your heart in the quiet you find here and to extend his hand of support that will sustain you as you enter into communion with him. I wonder. Could it be possible that we are actually walking on the water all the time? It's just that we don't yet realize it?

Thank you for coming here today and leaving the safety and comfort of your homes. Let us together open our hearts like Elijah did and Peter did as the Lord invites us to do things that we never even thought were possible.