

August 10, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Today's Gospel is about storms, the reality that when you serve God, and are trying to be obedient to Christ, you will have to face storms in life. The Gospel uses the image of Peter's faith retreating when faced with a sudden violent wind.

Some years ago, Karen and I experienced a sudden and violent storm in the Aegean sea. Unlike our Lord and the disciples in their wooden fishing boat on an inland lake, we were in an 80,000 ton cruise ship. But as the strong wind bore down on the Aegean, as if out of nowhere, we felt the rocking of that huge ship and couldn't help thinking how incredibly scary it must have been in those tiny fishing boats all those years ago, when they were faced with the same kind of sudden storm.

The message in today's Gospel is of course not talking about physical storms that are common in nature, but the storms of trials and difficulty.

Sitting here today, many of us are going through storms, many times not of our own making. Maybe it's money problems, or problems in relationships. We might be having family problems, or problems at our jobs or schools. We all have storms in life, but if any of us think that faith in Jesus Christ is a safe harbour in the storms of life, I am afraid that is not the case.

Anyone who tells us Christianity is smooth sailing doesn't understand what the Bible teaches about serving the Lord. The most direct scripture to that effect is in the second letter to Timothy, Chapter 3 verse 12 which says, *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Faith in Jesus Christ may not make life all smooth sailing but it provides the connection to an inner peace, the connection to our spiritual being that has a loving relationship with God and the certainty of life eternal.

Faith in Christ does not make us immune from storms and adversity. It is how we deal with them that makes all the difference.

By calling on the Holy Spirit to work with us through the storms..... this is what makes the difference. This is what keeps us afloat and able to deal with not just our own problems, but to help others with their adversities.

Matthew's Gospel says Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side. And they did, or at least they tried to, hours later they had not made much progress because their boat was being battered in the storm.

But then, early in the morning they saw their Lord and Master walking toward them on the water. ....This is a clear message to us all... in the times of our facing our personal storms, our Lord Jesus is with us.

I am sure some of us have been reading of the violent persecution of Christians in Iraq, The following are the actual words from a news report dated July 26th.

"The vicar of the only Anglican church in Iraq has warned the end for Christians in the country appears "very near" as he appealed for help after a deadline set by Islamic militants to convert or be killed expired. Canon Andrew White, dubbed "the bishop of Baghdad" for his work at St George's church in the capital, spoke after the ultimatum handed to Christians in the northern city of Mosul by the Islamic State of Iraq Levant (Isis) to convert, pay a tax or be put to death passed last week.

For those Christians who did not comply with the decree by 19 July, Isis warned that "there is nothing to give them but the sword." Many have since fled their homes and Rev. Andrew-White told BBC Radio that desperate Christians were trapped in the desert or on the streets with nowhere to go.

"Things are so desperate, our people are disappearing," he said. "We have had people massacred, executed simply for being a Christian".

"Are we seeing the end of Christianity in Iraq?"

Canon White concludes his comments by saying "We are committed to Christ come what may, we will keep going to the end, but it looks as though the end could be very near."

This story reminds us that the persecution suffered by so many early Christians is very much alive in the modern world.

The Gospel today recalls Peter's rather hesitant attempt at emulating our Lord walking on the water, and then sinking in the water. This reminded me of a story my Welsh friend Nigel told me some years ago. ...Let us remember that humour is a fine antidote to so many worries and concerns we face in the world. I say this for those of us who still find Welsh humour a little strange...even after 40 years...right Karen !!

A Welsh farmer wanted to impress his hunting buddies. So he went out and bought the smartest, most expensive welsh terrier hunting dog he could find. He trained this welsh terrier, "Dewi" to do things no other dog on earth could do--- impossible feats that would surely amaze anyone. Then he invited his neighbours to go duck hunting with him.

After a long patient wait in the boat, a group of ducks flew over and the hunters were able to shoot a few of them down. Several ducks fell in the water. The farmer looked at the dog and said, "Go get em Dewi"

The dog leaped out of the boat, walked across the water, picked up a bird and returned to the boat. As soon as he dropped the duck in the boat he trotted off across the water again and grabbed another duck and brought it back to the boat.

The farmer swelled up with pride as his dog walked across the water and retrieved each of the birds one by one. Kind of smugly, he looked at one of his buddies, Roger, and asked him, "Do you notice anything unusual about my dog?"

Roger sat back, rubbed his chin and thought about it for a while. Finally Roger said, "You know boyo I do see something unusual. You haven't even taught the dog how to swim."

For fear of being repetitive, storms are inevitable in our lives, we just have to recognise God's presence in the storms, and have faith that he will carry us through to calm and tranquillity.

When faced with these storms, we are often tormented by waves of disappointment and doubt. We are no better at recognizing our Lord's presence in these storms than his disciples were.

Jesus longs for both his disciples and for us to be able to trust him..... particularly when we are faced with personal storms.

The problem is frequently we just don't understand that or we forget.....and we sink in the water

Matthew tells us, his readers, to know that Jesus often comes when least expected in the middle of a storm.

I believe that the limits of our human experience.... those times when our problems seem to be insurmountable....with no possible solution, those are the most frequent meeting places with God. Those are the divinely appointed moments that come into all of our lives. And in the trauma of the moment, if we are not looking for our Lord, we might just miss him

Lord Jesus help us to walk with you. Help us to recognise whatever it is that frightens us or keeps us from coming to you, keeps us from trusting you, keeps us from obeying you.

Help us to face whatever it is that we are afraid of and to trust you to save us from sinking but rather rising with you to life eternal..... Amen.