



June 24, 2018 - New and Holy Possibilities

(Mk 4:35-41)

Given by Rev. Mattei

If you don't get in a car with a stranger, would you get into a boat with one? And what if you notice he is sleep deprived? You might be glad he is not at the helm. That's what I think the disciples were thinking when they saw Jesus climbing on board. He was so quickly sound asleep he did not notice the raging storm. Yet, they all followed him because he was no stranger to them. Jesus had called them with the clear intention from the start to so strengthen and equip them that they would become fishers of people (Mk 1:17). His mind was clear about what he wanted and how he was going to achieve it: Jesus wanted nothing less than the Kingdom of God for humanity, and his disciples were going to experience its transformative power. In fact, by getting it straight from Jesus, they were going to preach about it (Mk 3:14-15).

"The single most repeated phrase in the Gospels is [what] Jesus uses to describe the vision and focus of his ministry: the Reign of God... This is the reign of service, reconciliation, justice, generosity, compassion and peacemaking. Jesus calls disciples to *this vision*. Is it fair to say that Jesus did not call disciples to follow him for the purpose of idolizing or honoring him? Rather, the reason to follow him is that he is pointing toward a new possibility—a holy possibility." (Jack Jezreel)

But the disciples were still wondering about Jesus' identity. They still didn't know what to make of the One who calmed the storm. Could it be that Jesus is the full manifestation of the divine Presence, and his word is the full communication of God's desire for us? Could it be said that God's creative word was life giving and life affirming in the midst of chaos at the beginning of the Universe (Gen. 1:1); that in its prophetic force it has stared down socio-political chaos (Ex. 3-13) and is even now transforming the confusion of chaos and the fear of death into a vision of peace and the joy of new life?

If it is true that all gospels' stories need to be read with the proclamation of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension in mind, the disciples' response should have been positive. Yet, they still wondered and so do we. In fact, we also have a hard time remembering the resurrection story, the story of how God affirms abundant life, generosity, hospitality and reconciliation in the face of chaotic hatred, cruelty, greed and divisions. We also display stubborn amnesia of how our God has liberated us on

repeated occasions from the slavery of evil into the promised land of Shalom where we have tasted the milk and honey of forgiveness, acceptance, validation, peace, inclusion and solidarity.

Whenever a new crisis arises do we still wonder together with Jesus' disciples: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mk 3:38) or do we see in it the opportunity for new life? In the heart of chaos, there is a platform for shared growth and social change. Sometimes chaos—however messy, disorienting, and dangerous—furnishes opportunities to see God anew.

I have experienced storms in my life but none of them have been calmed by a spoken word or a hand gesture. I have noticed how my life could have been easily over when driving through a heavy downpour or a blinding snowstorm, or slowly skidding on ice through a red light. I have survived spiritual and emotional storms where my shame and guilt were bigger than my desire to live. My survival was not self-achieved but procured to me through caring words of forgiveness, encouragement and reintegration. That's when I experienced resurrection life and heard the words of Jesus commanding, "Peace! Be still!" (Mk 3:39)

The continued experience of human vulnerability through the storms of life exposes us to the interconnectedness of all creation. Compassion is nurtured. Generosity provides to the needs of all, manifesting our one, true humanity. It's only when we are governed by fear that our mind is blinded and our trust in the God of resurrection becomes inaccessible. We panic. Storms seem life threatening. God seems asleep or far away.

It certainly feels that way when we are in the eye of the storm. It feels that way today as we seem to struggle to understand what it means to be humane and Christian and the proper way to address the stranger in our midst. It must feel very overwhelming and lonely to the children separated from their parents at the Southern border, a storm that very easily make one wonder if God even sees what is going on and why God doesn't intervene. Is God asleep, indeed? Or is it better to ask of ourselves: Are we asleep in the face of so much evil?

It all starts with our personal answer to the disciples' question: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Then, if our mind goes back to our personal experience of resurrection life and reply that this is Jesus, Savior and Messiah, do we trust that his words of truth and life give power and strength and can regenerate life to those we are willing to show mercy, forgiveness, compassion, humanity, generosity and good will? Such is Mark's question throughout his gospel: who is Jesus to you? And such is Jesus' question to us: do you have any faith? Do you trust my Word? Will you risk your life for the Kingdom? Will you approach life events and especially face life

crisis with courage, hope and trust and proclaim Jesus' new Way of relating, of loving and of being so that God may reign and the sacrality of life affirmed?