

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Pentecost 10, Proper 14, August 9, 2020

READINGS:

I Kings 19:9-18

Psalm 85:8-13

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

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

In today's readings we see, through the eyes of the prophet Elijah, a great wind, and earthquake, and a fire, and hear a sound of sheer silence, and a question, "What are you doing here?"

In today's readings we see, through the eyes of the disciples of Jesus, a raging wind, battering waves, and their Lord walking on the water, and hear his call to Peter, "Come."

In today's readings, the prophet Elijah and the disciples of Jesus experience faith, and doubt, AND the presence of God, and renewed faith.

I think we can all relate to that cycle in the life of faith! We live now with a pandemic, an environmental crisis, and a huge outcry seeking justice and mercy and equal treatment for all God's children, all at once! Life's challenges can be very frightening, and very overwhelming. I have times when I think I would happily trade Elijah for his wind, earthquake, and fire; or the disciples for their wind, waves, and water-walking attempt!

As our reading from I Kings begins, Elijah comes to a cave on Mount Horeb, where he has been promised he will find God. He has literally been running for his life from the King of Israel, Ahab, and his wife Jezebel, who have turned from Yahweh to worship Baal. It is pretty safe to say he is at a low point in his faith.

Hiding in his cave on the mountainside, he experiences a great wind, an earthquake, a fire, and the sound of sheer silence before he hears God's voice asking, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah answers that although he has been very "zealous" and faithful to God, the Israelites have broken their covenant. They have thrown down God's altars and killed his prophets, and now, Elijah says, he is the only one left, and the Israelites want to kill HIM! He sounds at the end of his rope. Can you relate? I can.

The writer of I Kings tells us that God just gives Elijah his next assignment. He is to anoint a new king for Syria, and a new king for the people of Israel, and he is to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. His faith in God strengthened, Elijah gets back to work in the verses that follow today's reading, calling Elisha away from his ox team and his plowing to follow him.

Our reading from Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus sending his disciples into their boat to go ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He needs some quiet time to pray after a long day teaching and feeding a crowd of over 5,000 people.

Matthew tells us that a storm comes up, and that the boat the disciples are in is being battered by the waves, AND that the wind is against them. Early on that stormy morning Jesus comes to them, walking on the sea. They are terrified, and think he is a ghost. They sound at the end of THEIR rope. Can you relate? I can.

Peter recovers his faith first. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water," he says. And Jesus answers, "Come." Peter is doing well, walking on the water, until the strong wind frightens him. He starts to sink, but calls to Jesus for help. Jesus catches his hand, and they both get into the boat. The wind stops. Their faith in God strengthened, the disciples worship their Lord, saying "Truly you are the Son of God."

Matthew tells us in the verses following our reading that Jesus and the disciples cross to Gennesaret, where Jesus immediately gets back to work, healing the sick.

In our journey with Christ, our faith will not always be as strong as we want it to be. We will be challenged by the circumstances of our lives. Sometimes, we will be afraid. That is normal. Of course we will be afraid in the middle of life's storms! Then, our task is to recognize Jesus' presence, to listen to his words, to trust who HE is. That has always been the task of Christians, in all times and all places.

Saint Augustine, who lived from 354 to 430 A.D., has these encouraging words for us in his commentary on today's Gospel:

"Look at Peter, who in this episode is an image of ourselves; at one moment he is all confidence, at the next all uncertainty and doubt; now he professes faith in the immortal One, now he fears for his life...

When he counted on the Lord's help it enabled him to walk on the water; when human frailty made him falter he turned once more to the Lord, who immediately stretched out his hand to help him...

If you feel your foot slipping beneath you, if you become a prey to doubt or realize that you are losing control, if, in a word, you begin to sink, say: 'Lord, I am drowning, save me!'"

In our lives, like the prophet Elijah and the disciples of Jesus, we will experience faith, and doubt, AND the presence of God, and renewed faith.

When WE are at the end of our rope, Saint Augustine tells us that we should say, "Lord, I am drowning, save me!"

Then, our task is to recognize Jesus' presence in our lives, to listen to his words, to trust who HE is.

Then, with our faith strengthened, we get back to work. Just like the prophet Elijah. Just like Jesus and his disciples. There is plenty to do. A pandemic, an environmental crises, the pursuit of justice and equality, and a thousand other endeavors are waiting for our best efforts. And Jesus says, "Come!"

Amen.