

Laura Blazek - July 26th, 2015

This is the last Sunday morning that I will stand before robed in nothing but white. The next Sunday I stand before you, the white will be broken by a stole as I will be an ordained deacon. This journey to ordination would not have been possible without the prayers and support of all of you. I couldn't have asked for better companions on this journey. You have helped me laugh when I wanted to cry, helped me to grow in my ministry, bolstered my confidence when it began to slip away, and tolerated my blunders with grace. Thank you all for walking this path with me.

When I reflect back on this journey, I can empathize with the disciples in the boat on their way to Capernaum. There have been times when strong winds and rough seas threatened to capsize my boat and dump me into the sea. Life is like that though- unpredictable. We find ourselves in a boat headed for someplace, and there are many times we don't even know what or where this someplace is, but the waters are calm and serene. Life is good.

Then the wind picks up; the storm rolls in; the boat begins to rock; the waves rise higher and higher- tossing us about as we cling desperately to the sides of the boat hoping that the storm and wind will go away and having no idea what to do until it does. Feeling alone and helpless. Feeling out of control. Feeling like no matter how hard we try to row ourselves out of the storm, it is pointless, fruitless, because we are stuck in the middle of a storm that threatens to consume us. It is a scary place to be.

We become so focused on the task of staying afloat, so lost in ourselves, that when someone else approaches we jump a mile. Like when you are vacuuming, singing at the top of your lungs to your favorite song coming through your ear buds because no one else is around, then you feel a tap on your shoulder. I think terrified pretty well sums it up.

Imagine then being a disciple in the boat on the way to Capernaum. For three to four miles their world had been narrowed to weathering the storm in the dark, keeping the boat from capsizing, focusing on rowing- catch, drive, extract, recover. Nothing existing outside of that- catch, drive, extract, recover- over and over and over- just trying to survive the storm. Suddenly, out of the corner of their eye they see movement, something that shouldn't be there. Is it really any wonder that the disciples were terrified?

Then Jesus says, "It is I; do not be afraid." And the disciples take Him into the boat. I can't imagine it was as simple as that. It must have taken some time for their brains to process what their hearts were telling them. Quelling a fight or flight response isn't easy. At the very least

there must have been some mumblings like, “Easy for you to say. You almost gave me a heart attack!” or, “Give a body some warning next time!” or maybe a playful punch to the shoulder, “Jesus, don’t scare me like that!” Then I think the disciples relaxed, calmed their racing hearts, and were willing to take Jesus into the boat. Once they allowed the calming presence of Jesus to fill their hearts they could accept that things would work out and they would make it to where they were going.

At my ordination, we will sing St. Patrick’s Breastplate, hymn #370, “I bind unto myself today...” I think of it as the hymn that varies tune three times, or four depending on how you count the last verse. You’re singing along, finally thinking you have a handle on this hymn and then out of the middle of nowhere comes verse six. The tune of six is a startling shift, almost like it shouldn’t be there. But it is my favorite verse and one that I often find myself singing or saying when I need to remember I’m not alone. It brings peace and serenity. If you are more visual pull out the hymnal, #370, verse 6.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,

Christ behind me, Christ before me,

Christ beside me, Christ to win me,

Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love me,

Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

It is a hymn; it is a prayer, not unlike our reading in Ephesians, that reminds us of the fullness of God and the peace that Christ brings to us all. Christ is here, and here, and here.... We are surrounded by Jesus and wrapped in the love of God if we will just close our eyes, sense His presence, and be not afraid.

This is easier said than done though. It isn’t as simple as it sounds. When we have been hurt and hurt again, over and over and over. When we have suffered disappointment after disappointment

after disappointment. When we have had to live through one loss after another. Fear is felt not only at the moment. Fear becomes a constant companion.

Jesus strolls into that fear-filled-tempest, asking us to release our fears, to trust Him to bring us peace. Relinquishing what little control we have in our lives is terrifying. But like the disciples on the boat, we have to open ourselves to Christ's presence so that then we can start to relax, calm our racing hearts, and trust Christ to chase away our fears. The boat may continue to rock, but once we trust in Christ, then the fear, like the seas, will be calmed. We must trust that we will reach our destination safely, though perhaps not as quickly as we would like.

This doesn't mean that whatever turmoil we are facing in our lives will immediately disappear. Nor is there a guarantee that we will never experience hurt, disappointment or loss again. It is a guarantee that we won't weather those rough times alone. Verse six of hymn #370 tells us why, because we are surrounded by the love of Christ. Christ is there to ground us, steady our boat, and calm the tumultuous seas of life. Christ is there to bring us peace and to help heal our brokenness.

Several years ago, in a time of turmoil I learned an exercise to help sense Christ's presence. Turn and look at someone sitting close to you. Fix their image in your mind and then close your eyes. Can you still feel their presence even though you can no longer physically see them? Now, change their image to that of Jesus and sense His presence. Some will find this easier than others, but in the fullness of time you can even learn to feel Christ's arms wrapped around you.

Simple, yet not so simple. It takes time. It takes strength of our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts. In doing so, we become rooted and grounded in love. It takes faith that we are never truly alone. We must trust in the power of Christ to heal us and make us whole.

In the midst of the tumultuous seas of life, close your eyes, sense Christ's presence, and be not afraid.

Amen.