

## 12<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)

Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D. – June 21, 2009

Today's readings reminded me of the two University of Tennessee graduates (anybody here go to UT?) who were looking out at the sea one day. One said,

“Sure is big, ain't it?”

The other one said,

“Yeah. And that's just the top.”

Even though we hear quite a bit about the sea in Scripture, the ancient Hebrews were not really a seafaring people. For much of their history, they wandered in the desert. Camels and tents were more familiar to them than ships and open water.

Even after they settled down, their capital Jerusalem is about 30 miles from the shores of the Mediterranean. We hardly ever hear them talk about the Mediterranean. The Dead Sea was about 12 miles away in the other direction, and the Sea of Galilee was maybe 90 miles away to the north.

Whenever we hear about the sea in Scripture, it seems like it's usually something about a storm or wind and waves or something to be afraid of. In their collective imagination, the sea was powerful, beyond their control, disturbing, dangerous, intimidating, frightening. It represents a force greater than man, a force no one can control. It represented something deep, impenetrable, unreachable, like a bottomless abyss.

When the people of Israel were trying to understand their world and how it was created, they were probably exposed to some of the legends and myths of the people around them. For the ancient Egyptians, the Earth emerged from the primordial and chaotic waters. The Genesis account of creation begins with

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.”

So in the very beginning, there was water, wind, darkness. God brought order to the chaos, creating light and separating the waters. The next time we hear about water in Scripture is the Genesis account of the Great Flood – again, water was threatening, dangerous, something to be feared, something only God could save us from.

In today's reading from Job, God says, "Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!" By this time, it is clear that God has absolute sovereignty over everything He created, even over the extraordinary power of the sea.

All through Scripture, water is a recurring theme – in the blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil, we are reminded of the many times water has been a part of salvation history – our history. But water is a force to be controlled by God.

Jesus says "the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea." When he calls Peter and Andrew, he says, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Much of Jesus' activity was around the Sea of Galilee. Today, He's out in a boat with his disciples. It was his idea to go for a boat ride, but He decided to take a nap. Mark says that He was probably tired after a long day of preaching in parables. I've never been there, but they tell me that the Sea of Galilee is notorious for its sudden storms. Now one of those sudden violent storms comes up, and the disciples are in fear of their very lives. And Jesus is asleep.

The disciples thought the danger was outside the boat, in the storm; but the danger was really inside – inside themselves, in their lack of faith.

In their fear and panic, the disciples call on Jesus to save them. Jesus speaks to the sea, and the sea obeys: "Quiet! Be still!" Then "the wind ceased and there was great calm."

Pretty impressive performance, wouldn't you say? If we saw somebody do that, I'm guessing we'd want to know more about that person, and probably wouldn't want to let him out of our sight. After all, he has the power and authority of God.

I'm sure a lot of people have trouble believing that God can actually change anything in the weather or in the storms. We're more enlightened today – we know that it's all a matter of scientifically verifiable factors. Some people even believe that human beings – you know, those primates that walk on two legs and have opposable thumbs – that human beings can figure out how to control all that. The Greeks had a word for that – hubris.

I know all of us have experienced storms in our lives. The sea is calm, winds light and variable, and all of a sudden we're in the middle of an unexpected storm in our lives. We can lose our sense of direction, decide we ought to go one way when we really ought to go the other. For most of us, there have been times like that when we thought the Lord was asleep. Lord, can't you see what's happening here? Don't you care about me? Are you ignoring me?

It may not always seem like it, but God is always aware of what's going on in our lives. I think today's Gospel reminds us of that. Like the disciples, the danger isn't really from outside – it's from inside ourselves. After Jesus rebuked the sea, he rebuked the disciples. Didn't you know I wasn't going to let anything happen to you? You must have thought I was asleep, didn't you? I was just dozing. I wasn't going to let anything happen to you.

Maybe that's the lesson for today. Even when there are storms in our lives, even when it seems like we're going down for the third time, we need to summon up the courage to place our trust in our God. He loves us and cares for us and won't let us perish.

No guarantees, though. The outcome may not always be what we want – but at least we are assured of support. Of course, we don't always understand the ways of God. We can't figure out why things are happening to us. The world around us can be as threatening and frightening and intimidating and menacing to us as the sea was to the Hebrews.

But it shouldn't surprise us if we can't figure it out and deal with it on our own. We just can't see the big picture.

In our first reading, God speaks to Job out of a storm. Job must have finally realized that God is God – and that Job is not.

Maybe that's the lesson for us. It's easy for us to think that we know what's best, that we can figure it out on our own. Maybe we don't see that kind of thinking as a sin, but maybe we need to repent of it and try to stop doing it. That's kind of what Job did at the end of the book.

So today, let's think about the kind of person who can calm the wind and the waves and save us from whatever threatens us. If we knew somebody like that, we'd be in awe of him. We'd want to be with him all the time, just in case. I hope we'd remember to thank him whenever he helped us. I hope we'd thank him for simply allowing us to be in his presence.

## READINGS

Reading 1  
Jb 38:1, 8-11

The Lord addressed Job out of the storm and said:  
Who shut within doors the sea,  
when it burst forth from the womb;  
when I made the clouds its garment  
and thick darkness its swaddling bands?  
When I set limits for it  
and fastened the bar of its door,  
and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stilled!

Responsorial Psalm  
Ps 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31

R. (1b) Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They who sailed the sea in ships,  
trading on the deep waters,  
These saw the works of the LORD  
and his wonders in the abyss.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

His command raised up a storm wind  
which tossed its waves on high.  
They mounted up to heaven; they sank to the depths;  
their hearts melted away in their plight.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They cried to the LORD in their distress;  
from their straits he rescued them,  
He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze,  
and the billows of the sea were stilled.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They rejoiced that they were calmed,  
and he brought them to their desired haven.  
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his kindness  
and his wondrous deeds to the children of men.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading II  
2 Cor 5:14-17

Brothers and sisters:

The love of Christ impels us,  
once we have come to the conviction that one died for all;  
therefore, all have died.  
He indeed died for all,  
so that those who live might no longer live for themselves  
but for him who for their sake died and was raised.  
Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh;  
even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh,  
yet now we know him so no longer.  
So whoever is in Christ is a new creation:  
the old things have passed away;  
behold, new things have come.

Gospel  
Mk 4:35-41

On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples:

"Let us cross to the other side."  
Leaving the crowd, they took Jesus with them in the boat just as he was.  
And other boats were with him.  
A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat,  
so that it was already filling up.  
Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion.  
They woke him and said to him,  
"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"  
He woke up,  
rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!"  
The wind ceased and there was great calm.  
Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified?  
Do you not yet have faith?"  
They were filled with great awe and said to one another,  
"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"