

*Calm Amidst the Storm*

Last summer Melanie and I went to Niagara Falls for our vacation. Neither of us had been there before. We wanted to do all the things tourists typically do there, and that included riding *the Maid of the Mist*. *The Maid of the Mist* is a 72 feet long boat that goes right up to the edge of the base of the *Horseshoe Falls*. The boat was packed full with about 300 people. Everyone was wearing the light blue plastic rain ponchos they issue to all passengers.

As the boat approached the falls the water churned and the waves started breaking into the boat. The boat tossed and pitched, and the spray drench us everywhere not covered by the poncho. The boat got unbelievably close to the falls. It was a breathtaking view. But I think that had we gotten just a few feet closer the boat would have been hit by the tremendous power of the all that water falling 170 feet and that probably would have capsized the boat. Only an extremely strong swimmer could have survived in that rough water around the falls.

Yet no one, not even me, felt particularly frightened. There was obviously a real element of danger there, but no one was especially concerned. In fact, everyone seemed to enjoy the ride without virtually any thought to the potential danger. Why? Why was no one scared? Why wasn't I scared? I'll try to answer that a bit later.

In today's gospel reading we find the disciples were in some ways in a similar situation. They were out on a big lake, in a little boat, when a bad storm blew up, and, to top it all off, it was nighttime. The disciples had every good reason to be afraid, especially since people in that time and place thought of the sea and darkness as being evil and chaotic. They were not overreacting in the least. Their boats, and the other boats with them, were in real trouble. We could make a pun and say they were "all in the same boat."

In our language we have that expression "we're all in the same boat," meaning that we are all in the same troubled situation and that our fortunes are tied together. For instance, regarding the current financial crisis, we are all in the same boat. The bad economy has hurt everyone to some degree, and to turn things around will take the cooperation of business, labor, consumers, and government. Everyone has a stake in fixing the economy, so "we're all in the same boat."

It's true we're also all in the same boat together as the church, just as the disciples and Jesus and the other boats were all in the same boat. The survival of the disciples in the boat was tied to Jesus' survival. In fact, we often use a boat to represent the church and we really are all in the same boat as the church today. Within congregations, and between the synods and the ELCA, and ecumenically and globally as well, the strength of our ministry and mission, and perhaps our very survival as the church, is closely linked to one another.

We as Christians do not live in isolation. Decisions one part of the Christian community makes affect all Christians everywhere. The financial hardships

of any one member are a reason for all of us to be concerned. When one member of the body of Christ suffers persecution for their faith, we all suffer.

Pastor and poet John Donne wrote in his famous poem *Meditation XVII*, popularly known as *No Man is an Island*, an accurate description of our connectedness as human beings. He wrote, “The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into the body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author and is one volume... Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind.”

When the disciples were sure that they were really facing death, they woke Jesus. Jesus had been sleeping through the storm. I can appreciate that. Once when we lived in Dover, I got a call one morning from a parishioner asking if my family and me were okay. I said, “Yes, why wouldn’t we be okay?” and she said, “Well, a tornado went down your street last night.” When I looked out the window our backyard was full of roofing tiles, tiles that had come off of a house down the street from us. Miraculously, our home had been untouched. Several homes on our block were damaged, and we slept through it all.

Anyway, the disciples woke Jesus and rather than say something straightforward like, “Help!” they ask a rhetorical, sarcastic-sounding question, “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” Of course, Jesus would

care if they were perishing – he loved them. But Jesus, as he so often did, answered their question with another rhetorical question, “Have you no faith?” The disciples were notoriously lacking in faith, which makes them a lot like us I suppose. Well, Jesus wasn’t just going to talk about the weather, he was actually going to do something about it, and do something he did!

So even before they could answer, Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and restored the sea to calm. Actually, “rebuked” might be too strong a word. The original Greek implies that Jesus chided the wind and waves the way an adult might talk to a small child or a pet. The wind and waves that were so threatening to the disciples were no threat at all to Jesus. He leveled them out with just a word.

Having seen this miracle, the disciples asked another rhetorical question amongst themselves, “Who is this man?” Mark the gospel writer didn’t record how the disciples answered their own question, if they answered it all then, but we know the answer. We know the answer because we live on the other side of the cross. We know the answer because we know about Jesus’ resurrection. We know that Jesus is not just a man; he is God, God in human flesh. That is why he could sleep through the storm. It wasn’t like me sleeping through a tornado because I couldn’t hear or wasn’t paying attention. For Jesus it was his supreme confidence in God his Father that allowed him to sleep peacefully amidst the storm.

And I suppose that’s similar to why and I, and everyone else on the *Maid of the Mist*, wasn’t afraid of the boat being capsized by the falls and all of us drowning. We knew the captain of the boat did this everyday, several times

a day, for years and years. We trusted that he knew exactly what he was doing. Isn't' funny that we can so easily put that much faith in a fallible human being, and yet it is so hard for us to have faith in Christ who cannot fail? When we get hit by all kinds of hardships and injustices, when storms and tornados strike, our first response is to say , "Jesus, don't you care?" when we know full well that Jesus does care and we should have confidence in him to get us through the rough times.

I just came home from the synod assembly this week and the ELCA Churchwide Assembly is coming up in August, and these are some, rough challenging times for our synod and the nationwide church. I'm concerned, but I'm trusting God. We have worries about the economy and the war and so many other foreign and domestic political concerns. And again, I'm concerned, but I'm trusting God. In all of life, through illnesses and whatever else life may bring, as God's children we can rightfully, faithfully say when we are threatened and harassed, "I'm concerned, but I'm trusting God." God cares for us, he will never abandon us, and we are safe in the boat of the church with him. Amen.