

Title: Let us Cross To the Other Side

Texts: Job 31: 1-11; Mark 4:25-41

Rev Sharon Smith

Mark 4:35-41

When evening had come, [Jesus said to the disciples,] "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Introduction:

On this Day of honouring our fathers, I have been recalling some memories of my Dad helping me... "to cross to the other side".

- I was afraid of bouncy castles with all the other children on it, but one day I climbed on and couldn't move. My Dad got all the kids off so that I could not only cross over but have a few jumps along the way.
 - In my teens, our Dad drove us to Emily's family home – a Xhosa woman who cleaned our home
Once a week. We drove into the rural areas to a place where there was no running water, no sanitation, a simple life but a poor life. My eyes were forever opened at life lived on the other side.
-

The gospel according to Mark records a story of crossing over.

Safely in a boat, the disciples led by Jesus, cross over from Jewish territory on one side of the Sea of Galilee to Gentile territory on the other side. Though these geographic territorial markers do not seem to be accurate with the history of the time, the author seems interested in articulating what Ched Myers calls geo-social space in terms symbolic of the narrative.

And this crossing over leads the disciples into the land of the Gerasene's where Jesus encounters an Evil Spirit.

Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man

Crossing over in our 21st century world, may not be by boat.

It may be an invitation to make a difficult decision, or to move toward a person who you are not sure about, or to learn more about something that intrigues you but scares you.

Crossing over or Crossing the Divide...

Christine Valters Painter, invites us to consider divisions as mirrors of our divided self:

She writes:

Crossing the Divide

She walks, as if from a dream, into your life,
ribboned hair unraveling, brown eyes
like cups of tea, come to whisper
a secret into your trembling ear.
You try hard not to listen, clinging
to your calendar, your achievements,
your loneliness, until the silver ache
of it all spreads through your limbs
and she holds out her hand across
the ravine, and you see how the chasm
is not empty, but filled with a rushing
river, and you can swim until
you become fish and flow, until
you are the ancient stream
emerging from stone,
until her face becomes yours.

-Christine Valters Paintner, The Wisdom of Wild Grace

<https://vimeo.com/562759782>

In our Canadian consciousness now, we are being invited to learn about our past intercultural relationships, befriending our ancestors and our own oppressive impulses within us. The ways that our ancestors interacted, oppressed or were oppressed.

We are being invited to listen without giving advice.

To bring our human selves to each other.

For no matter who was responsible for our past, we are responsible to make sure that all people have equal standing in our present.

To cross over from denial, from shame, from knowing the way – to curiosity and compassion and open heartedness.

For when two humans are truly curious about each other, listening deeply, seeking to be understood and mutually respectful, we can sit with the grief of the past, no matter how uncomfortable.

There is a mythic arc in all human stories – where after the courageous step to cross over, we encounter turbulent waves, overwhelm, fear. This is not a place of being alone.

This is common to humanity.

Mark's story invites us to stay a while in the place of chaos where there are no answers, to grieve, to feel the tumult inside. Even if we sense the absence of God. The sleeping Christ.

The nation of Israel in the writings of the Hebrew Bible bears witness to a chaotic force that counters the way of peace and justice.

The book of Job describes this chaos as a counter creation force... usually personified as creatures of the deep seas – like Leviathan.

Walter Brueggemann writes that the stormy waters resemble this chaos – and we are faced with questions about the power and trustworthiness of God.

For somehow, evil persists, despite the work of God to order the chaos.

Some Christians have chosen to close off their theology and appeal to a Sovereign God who is fully in control.

I choose a theology rooted in lived experience, however unsettling because it leans into experience as our great teacher.

Rob Bell in his recent book, Everything is Spiritual, writes:

“The energetic imprint of the Creator is what is in the Creation”

Our experience of faith, doubt, presence, absence, accompaniment, and loneliness is all spiritual. Each experience, if we are awake, will lead us to God.

For where we are is where God is, right there.

We see this so clearly in the Eucharist –

we bless this bread because all bread is blessed;

we bless this wine because all fruit, all wine is blessed.

Rob Bell speaking about his latest book, On the Way podcast:

https://omny.fm/shows/on-the-way/rob-bell-everything-is-spiritual?in_playlist=on-the-way!podcast

And so it is, that in the whirlwind of Job – God shows up and meets Job in his experience.

And in the stormy boat – Jesus the Christ wakes up and meets the disciples in their experience.

God is in this place, and I wasn't aware of it.

We are met in the place of fear, in the place of overwhelm, in the place of insecurity.

In the very act of crossing over.

I close with a prayer written by Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann in 1998:

Like an endless falling
"Things fall apart,
the center cannot hold."
We are no strangers to the falling apart;
We perpetrate against the center of our lives,
and on some days it feels
like an endless falling,
like a deep threat,
like rising water,
like ruthless wind.

But you (God)...you in the midst,
 you back in play,
 you rebuking and silencing and ordering,
 you creating restfulness in the very eye of the storm.

You ...be our center:
 cause us not to lie about the danger,
 cause us not to resist your good order.

Be our God. Be the God you promised,
 and we will be among those surely peaceable in your order.

We pray in the name of the one through whom all things hold together.
Amen.

From "Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann"