

We have difficulty understanding some of the things we read in the Gospels, especially with reference to the disciples. Sometimes, the disciples, when we read or hear of them, seem not very bright. It is easy to forget because we know how it all happened, that the disciples in the early chapters of the Gospels do not know what is to come. Nor do they really know who it is who has called them. They are trying to work it out. They had been called to follow me, by a clearly compelling, charismatic, itinerant preacher. What they know by the time of our passage this evening, is that he teaches in parables, quite a different manner from anything to which they are accustomed, he is able to exorcize daemons, he can heal the sick, and he pays little attention to rules particularly with respect to the sabbath. He tells them that they are favoured because to them has been given the secret of the kingdom while others will only have parables. So those in the boat in our passage are confused, mystified, intrigued and now terrified. Ask yourself how would you feel? Accosted by a stranger, called to drop everything, and follow that stranger. I would suggest that most of us would brand such a call as spam and would quickly delete or click unsubscribe.

While each of the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – reports Jesus' question of Peter, *Who do you say I am?* and Peter's response, *You are the Christ*. Those accounts come later. In Mark's case 4 chapters further on. 4 Chapters is a full quarter of the Gospel. Through their experiences with Jesus the disciples come to a growing sense of who he is. But that sense is still very undeveloped on that fateful night on a stormy Sea of Galilee.

I remind you that Mark is the Gospel that promises a path through great suffering. Its message is largely covered in tales of 4 crossings of the Sea of Galilee. The passage we heard read this evening is the first of those crossings. You will recall that I spoke last week of Jesus' ministry as one of radical inclusion. Well these crossings are a powerful symbol of radical inclusion. For the other side of the Sea is Gentile territory. In fact, our reading this evening is immediately followed by the healing of the man with an unclean spirit. Jesus causes the daemon that possesses him to leave him and inhabit the Gadarene Swine – clear demonstration that this is Gentile territory. No Jewish land would have had a heard of swine that are about as unclean as unclean can be. Jesus' 4 times crossing for ministry is a testimony to his message of radical inclusion. For example, you may have wondered why there are two separate feedings of a multitude. Yes one was on one side in Jewish territory; the other was on the other side in Gentile territory. You might make a connection between these two feedings of a multitude to the points I raised last week about admission to the Eucharist. If Jesus fed both Jew and Gentile miraculously, how much more inappropriate for us to raise up barriers to the miraculous meal that is the Eucharist.

Now let me say something about the Sea of Galilee. First of all, it is not a sea. It is a lake more properly known as the Gennesaret Lake. I have swum in it on two occasions. I assure

it is not salt water. The northern arm of the River Jordan flows from the melting snows of the ten thousand feet elevation of the Mt. Hermon range through verdant country into Gennesaret. The Jordan then flows out of it in its southern arm ending in the desolate area around the Dead Sea 1200 feet below sea level an 11,200 feet drop in just about 251 kilometres. You can imagine what the ancients might have done with the imagery of a river connecting the heights and the depths, the verdant and the desolate. I haven't time to go into that today. But do think of how much Jesus' ministry is centred around the Jordan. We never read of him near the Mediterranean. Luke is the only gospel writer who refers to the Lake of Gennesaret. Matthew, Mark, and John all refer to the Sea of Galilee. Why? Biblical scholars speculate that it is to align the crossing stories with the Hebrew identification of the sea as a place of chaos, upheaval, and, in time, God given deliverance. Think of Genesis 1: 9 *God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one, and let the dry land appear."* and of the parting of the Red Sea to allow the Hebrews to escape, and of Jonah and the whale. Only with God can one escape the threat of the chaos represented by the sea.

The storm is also symbolic of the outrage created by a message that applies equally to Jew and Gentile. We know from Peter's attitude in Acts against eating anything unclean until God demands that he call nothing God has made unclean. A ministry to Jew and Gentile would have been as chaotic for the disciples as any storm on the water.

Jesus rebukes the storm and the waters are stilled. He says to the disciples *Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?* The disciples are still learning, they will never know and never believe completely until the resurrection and ascension. Please do remember that Mark was writing in Rome just after a major massacre of Jewish followers of Jesus. He was writing to people who have just survived a major storm, but have lost many of their fellow believers. Mark is assuring his readers that Jesus will quell any storm if they hold firm and have faith.

What of us? God knows, everything is indicating that we will face all manner of storms in the years to come. We are lucky; the chaos is still to come here, but it has already broken upon the people of Gaza and the Sudan, people living in and threatened with ICE detention and deportation in the United States and people enduring fires, floods, and winds all as a result of human caused climate change. Many have already experienced things at least as bad as those Roman massacres in the mid 60's. Can we take Mark as our comfort and our strength? Will our faith be strong enough to see us through? Will we be strong enough to live our faith and not turn on one another as challenges multiply? Will we break down barriers? Will we dedicate ourselves to radical inclusion and radical love? With God's help we can. But it is not inevitable. We need to decide over and over again to break down barriers and resist division. Will we so decide? Amen