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Was it part of a plan? Jesus had ordered the disciples to head out right away on the boat, while he went to the mountain to pray. Why worry? The group included some professional fishermen; what could go wrong? Did he have any idea that there was a gale in the offing? Carpenters weren't famous for their nautical knowledge. So, Jesus went off to pray.

While he was at prayer, the storm went to sea and Jesus knew how that tended to terrify his group of followers. When he thought about his frightened friends, what did he do? He headed out to help them the only way he could. Now, as if the storm weren't enough to overwhelm them, they saw him actually walking on the waves. Of course, they thought he was a ghost! There was no other sensible explanation.

## **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

Psalms 85

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

As usual, only more so, the disciples didn't recognize Jesus for who he was: healer, bread-maker, lawbreaker, apparition ... none of the above, some of them all. Neither the disciples nor the religious leaders had the categories from which to understand him. All he could do for them was shout out, "Take courage, it is I." His greeting said, "I'm here for you."

This took place long before the Transfiguration. It was probably the first spectacular manifestation of Jesus as more than just one of the guys or rabbis. His sudden appearance right at the time of their greatest need was a prayer answered. It might have seemed as if the script came straight from the psalms that use drowning as the symbol for our need of God. The scene has overtones of the kind of appearances of God we hear about in Scripture: "Through the sea was your way. Your path, through the mighty waters" (Psalm 77:20) and "He alone ... treads upon the back of the sea" (Job 9:8). At some point, the disciples began to get the idea that Jesus had come as God for them.

So how did Peter respond? “If it’s you, let me do it too!” For a very brief instant he understood two dimensions of Jesus’ mission. In one lightening flash of insight, he realized that in all his greatness Jesus not only came from God, but also revealed humanity’s potential. Jesus hadn’t come to dazzle them, but to teach them that trusting in God would carry them where they never dreamed they could go.

When Jesus said, “Come,” Peter took the invitation and did the impossible. Momentarily, he overcame his fear and his sure knowledge of how everything works. To the astonishment of his companions, and probably even himself, he went overboard. This was his second step in discipleship, a continuance of what he started the day that he left his own boat on the beach to walk with Jesus through the land.

But nobody becomes a saint — or even a disciple — with just one step. Too soon, Peter reasoned that he couldn’t do it. Nobody can walk on water — especially with such a headwind! Practicality took its toll and Peter began to sink. Suddenly, he was back to shouting with his psalm-singing ancestors “Lord save me!”

Jesus, taking hold of him, was likely thinking: “Why did you waver?” Peter had taken his second step, but he couldn’t quite hold to it. He had just seen thousands eat their fill from a little store of bread. He had just seen Jesus advance calmly over the chaos of gale and surf. But, only for the briefest of moments did he believe in Jesus more than in gravity.



(Mark Bartholomew)

Jesus got Peter safely back on board and didn't start tutoring him in treading on water. Jesus never again invited him to embark on the sea without a boat. Not literally. But Jesus' call to give witness to his faith didn't end with the calming of the winds.

Our world is in desperate need of witnesses to the possibility of living Gospel values. Much of our world is drowning in overconsumption and media distraction. Our brothers and sisters are perishing from irrational violence and intolerable poverty, all in the shadow of scandalous wealth. Too many human beings, each of whom has a name and face cherished by God, languish on the margins of a busy world without anyone to gaze on them with the tenderness that alleviates loneliness, even if it cannot cure their ills or relieve the pains of aging.

We aren't being asked to walk on water, but to act like we believe that God's love for us and in us is more powerful than chaos, evil and apathy. The Gospel challenges us to take on the storms of our day with a love and hope that will risk going

overboard. The headwinds are fierce, but the force of God's Spirit is greater still.

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