Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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"It is I, don't be afraid" (Mark 6:50).

1 John 4:11-18; Mark 6:45-52

A long sleepless struggle delivers us to that deep place where night is passing to dawn. Tangled bedclothes and a pillow stained with sweat show evidence of an anguished grappling with no way forward. All resources exhausted, we beg for relief, an answer, the insight and courage to take the next step. Acceptance or action, we cannot stay where we are. It has become a matter of life or death. It is the fourth watch, darkness before dawn.

Once we understand that the Gospels are not so much narratives as manuals--"how-to" instructions for discipleship, today's story of the disciples in the boat from Mark 6 takes on new power. We call these texts “passages” and indeed they are just that. To enter into them is to encounter a living Word that invites us into transformation.

Yesterday's account of Jesus feeding the crowds in the wilderness, then, in today's reading, sending his disciples on ahead in the boat across the sea, were meant to introduce the newly baptized of Mark’s community to the Paschal Mystery, itself a reprise of the Exodus story.

Jesus, like Moses, provides manna in the wilderness. He is the bread God sends to satisfy us. This is the same God who saved Israel from bondage. The exodus from Egypt was their "Passover," the establishing event in their relationship with God. When their backs were to the sea and everything seemed against them, God was with them, opening up a way when all seemed hopeless.

The disciples are being taught by these repeated lake crossings, tossed by rough seas in the darkest hour, the wind against them, that Jesus (and for the early Christian community, this was the risen Jesus) would always be with them. No phantom, this Jesus walks toward them upon the water. The boat will survive the passage from death to new life -- the meaning of baptism -- and, even more dramatically, Christians will learn how to walk in continual Passover through every storm, and they will even dance upon the waters of death if necessary. By his crossing, Jesus has overcome death. We now share that power, unafraid, reassured that Jesus is always with us.

The story is now our own and is the source of our daily discipleship. It will not make sense until we experience it, in both small passages from fear to courage, or in those moments that come in the middle of the night, our spirits exhausted with fear and doubt threatening our security, our very existence. "Courage, it is I, don't be afraid."

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