

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

1Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a and Mt 14:22-33

No one can deny that anxiety levels are high at present. Within a month of the pandemic's arrival in America, prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications increased by 34%. ([The Margin](#)) Of course, the pandemic brought a slew of other anxiety-inducing problems -- in the economy, in education, entertainment, worship, health care, child care and day-to-day life. Likewise, George Floyd's murder was followed by a spike in anxiety and depression, disproportionately impacting black and Asian Americans. ([The Washington Post](#)) Almost everyone I talk to sounds more worried and leery than ever. Uncertainty, danger and the need for change on multiple levels have combined to create the perfect storm, raging around us.

What a great gift then that our gospel this week is the Calming of the Storm at Sea! Before we explore the story, which is meant to be taken both literally and metaphorically, please take a moment to name what is causing you anxiety today. Be aware of this as we listen for Jesus' message.

The context of the story is significant: it comes immediately after Jesus feeds more than 5,000 people with only a few loaves and fishes. The disciples are within hours of a prodigal demonstration of God's capacity to provide in desperate situations. Yet, they (and we) quickly switch to the "What have you done for me lately?" approach to God. Hasn't God proven time and again that God is for us? What is it that keeps us from going to a place of trust when trouble arises rather than to a place of doubt and anxiety?

The disciples are many stadia – a stadium is 600 feet – from what is sure and stable (land) and from Jesus, who can immediately solve their problems. They encounter adverse winds, which make waves that "torment" their boat. This is so like our lives! We venture into life, which naturally includes insecurity and risk. Although we know where we want to go, forces beyond our control become our adversaries, holding us back and creating an array of difficulties that torment us. God can seem far away, so far in fact that we may exclude God from the situation. It is our life and our goals, after all. Fortunately, God does not look at the situation that way. We read that during the fourth watch of the night – between 3 and 6 a.m.—Jesus walks toward the disciples in their misery. Are they relieved? No, it makes things worse! "They were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said and they cried out in fear." Anxiety makes everything seem like a hidden trap, even if Jesus Christ himself walked on water to reach us. This suspiciousness would be comical if it weren't so debilitating.

Ponder though how Jesus responds, "Take courage; it is I; do not be afraid." And he does not dismiss Peter's cheeky request to walk on water, but rather empowers him to do so. When Peter falters and cries out "Lord, save me," Jesus immediately stretches out his hand and catches Peter. Even though he will scold all the disciples for a lack of faith, Jesus never abandons them. Cling to this truth in your heart! It is our salvation! None of us need live in anxiety!

Let's not skip over how it must have felt to walk on water. As you picture yourself doing it, do not focus, as Peter does, on the adversarial wind; walk on water! In the lives of my heroes, Martin Luther King, Jr., Oscar Romero or Catherine of Siena, to name a few, I see so many points where God gave them incredible power to move through mighty obstacles. I can find lesser, but also powerful moments in my own life when I was able to be kind, generous, faithful beyond my normal abilities. God enables each of us to walk on water!

Elijah's story in 1Kings grounds this heady power in humility before God, whose power it actually is. Prior to this week's passage, Elijah stood up to the sinful King Ahaz and Queen Jezebel, revealed their 400 priests of Baal as charlatans and then killed all 400. He fled for his life to Mt. Horeb, looking for God to save him, but also to give him the next outrageous amount of power so Elijah could bring the country back to God. Elijah expected to be the one who completed this project; he expected God to appear in a display of outrageous power as a way of confirming Elijah's plan. Instead, God appears in a gentle breath of wind and tells Elijah others will complete the plan. We humans keep coming back to this same spiritual struggle: not my will, but God's will. Isn't that the root of our anxiety – lack of control – and isn't the cure realizing that God has all the power we need? We can carry out God's plan, a plan for good, a plan for life and abundance for everyone.

- ❖ What do the times of anxiety in your life have in common with the story of the Calming of the Storm?
What about this story gives you hope?
- ❖ When has God appeared to you in a way that upended your plans?