

Proper 14, Yr. A: On the Rocks

1 Kings 19:9-18; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, August 9, 2020

The churchwardens and the Rector went out for a boat ride. An intense storm rose up. The motor stopped. They forgot to bring the oars. They were pretty close to shore but still it was deep. They decided to pray. They asked the Lord to show them how to walk on the water.

The Junior Warden went first. He stepped very carefully and methodically. He made it to shore. The Sr. Warden went next. He followed the Junior Wardens' steps very carefully. He made it.

The Rector stepped out. As soon as he got on the water he plunged straight down. The Wardens looked at each other. The Junior Warden said, "I guess we should have told him where the rocks were..."

Sometimes God does it all for us but most of the time God asks us to take our part. God wants us to find our own way with his help. God puts rocks out for us. We need to discern where they are.

St. Peter walked on the water. He didn't just try, he actually did it for a moment. It was an amazing act of faith.

These guys were scared stiff. In the ancient world people were terrified of the water. They didn't have scientists to explain what lived under there. The waters and the weather were unknown forces.

And then they see a mysterious figure out there on top of the water.

Peter cries out, “Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And he does it! But when the wind comes up, Peter focuses on his fear instead of Jesus. He begins to sink. Jesus admonishes him, “You of little faith, why did you waver?”

We all live boats in the middle of storms. We live in our parishes, our families, and our communities. Our boats are often battered by the waves of stress and tossed about by the winds of frustration. These past five months we’ve been in a storm like we’ve never seen before.

In these storms, our boats drift far from Jesus. But he keeps walking towards us. When we reach out to him, he calms the winds. In faith, we go out on the water with him. Our frustration and distress begin to heal. But as soon as we look away we plunge down.

St. John Chrysostom, the great 5th century preacher, said of this Gospel passage, that when their fear was at its worst, Peter took the courage to move out onto the water but when the wind came up, he was no longer able to stand.

St. Chrysostom emphasizes, “So absolutely nothing does it avail to be near Christ, not being near him by faith.” In other words, it is one thing to confess Christ as our Lord and Savior with our lips but quite another to trust him with our lives.

We need to find the rocks God has placed in our lives. They are those people, places and practices that help us to continue our transformation into the likeness of Christ wherein we find true peace.

In this time when we cannot congregate and cannot receive the blessed Sacrament, we may feel there are no rocks to stand on. But they are there.

We have the Scriptures. We can still get quiet and listen for the Word of the Lord. We can still confess what we've done and haven't done and ask to be reconciled with God and others through Christ. We can still forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us.

Our daily prayers are rocks for us to stand on. Our Prayer Books and the Holy Scriptures are great boulders of strength for us. And our brothers and sisters in Christ are an email, text or phone call away. And we have this online presence to sustain us. Imagine the hardship of the last pandemic a century ago with no way to stay in touch.

As we continue to live through this most fretful time, we know where the rocks are. Even as it seems our world is collapsing, we still know where we stand. We stand atop the rolling waves as our Savior bids us to join him. And no wind or water will ever overtake us.

Jesus calls to us, "Take heart; It is I, do not be afraid."

And we call back, "Lord, command me to come to you on the water."

REFERENCE: *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily L.*
Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Online.