

Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

Sunday July 30, 2006

Proper 12, B

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Mark 6:45-52

We returned Friday from our “time share” cabin up on the shores of Lake Michigan. Now, I guess I need to confess that it is not technically a time share. But, it is a cabin that we share with others. The state of Michigan runs it for us. They have about 9 cabins at Wilderness State Park. We use two of them over the last two weeks of July. Other persons share the cabins and use them the rest of the year.

The cabins are not exactly the same. Some are right on the Lake, the others, back closer to the camping area. Some have bunks for twenty four, others, less. They all lack running water and electricity. They have cement floors, water pumps, wood burning stoves, bunks and bathrooms that can be described as “very rustic”. The cabins on the lake are more isolated and much more quiet. The cabins are also very very very dark. Honest to goodness, I laid in the cabins some nights, unable to sleep, and could tell absolutely no difference when I had my eyes opened or closed. I honestly could hold my hands in front of my face and truly not see them. It was pure, deep, darkness and sheer silence. There were nights when it truly was too dark, too quiet, too calm to sleep.

As I was laying there, unable to sleep in the deep silent, calm, darkness. I was thinking about the Gospel reading for today, and wondering what I would preach about. (yep, that’s the life of clergy....when other people can’t sleep, they count sheep...when preachers can’t sleep, they think about their sermon...they put you to sleep on Sunday as they put me to sleep during the week.....hard to believe eh?) The Gospel tells the story about the disciples crossing of the Sea of Galilee. In fact, Mark tells other stories of the disciples crossing the sea, the one from this morning when the disciples face an adverse wind, and another where the disciples face a storm. My imagination combined the crossings into one.

I tried to imagine myself on a night as dark as the cabins.....not on a bunk in a cabin but in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. It is dark, except when the lightning flashes across the sky. The boat rocks and dives in the crashing waves. The thunder crashes and the wind slashes. It is certainly not silent. No, there is the wind, the thunder, the cursing of fisherman. I don’t know exactly what they are screaming, but I am sure they are not singing “kumbaya”!! Then, to top it all off, they spy, coming across the sea, what they are sure is a ghost. As I lay calmly in my bed in the cabin, I tried to imagine the fear the disciples felt as they tried that night to cross the sea of Galilee.

Imagine the fear. You can hear it, feel it, taste it, and smell it.

St. Andrew’s, like many churches, with its wooden beams, and wooden sides is meant to remind us of a boat. Friends, in this Church, this boat, this morning there are people who come with fear as deep as was present in the boat that night. Persons are here fearful because of illness that touches them or someone they love. They are fearful as they worry about the lives of their loved ones, their families, their children, the lives of their parents. They are fearful as they worry about financial situations they face. They are fearful as they struggle with job, with school, with personal issues. They are here, fighting against the adverse winds and storms of life. They wonder if they can make it through another day. They are here, tossed about, making no headway in life. They can taste, feel, smell the fear that is in their hearts. Most likely there have been days, weeks, and months when you have felt that same fear. Perhaps you are feeling that fear this morning.

The image of Jesus walking on the sea and calming the wind is not just a story of Jesus controlling the forces of nature. Rather, the sea represents the unknown, the forces of life that cannot be controlled. In the ancient world, the sea was the dwelling place of terror, of demons, and creatures that cause chaos in the world. Jesus walking on the water and controlling the sea symbolizes his ability to calm the storms, control the chaos of life in the world. Jesus walking on the sea is a story of Jesus at work in the world today. He can calm the winds, and take away our fear. People come to church, this boat hoping that they will find the calming presence of Jesus, hoping that he will calm the storms of their life.

Perhaps they find that calm in the words of the Scripture, perhaps in the prayers, perhaps in the words of the hymns, perhaps in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Perhaps, they will find that calming presence in the people gathered, perhaps they will find it in you. Friends, never underestimate that power Jesus has given you, given us, to be a calming presence to those facing storms in their life. As the Body of Christ, Jesus acts through us, acts through you to calm the fears people bring with them to this place. By your presence here, by your words, when you share the Peace of Christ with others, Christ is at work in you to calm the storms that touch peoples lives.

The story however is also a story of the Church. The disciples are not in the boat for an evening cruise. They are in the boat because Jesus has sent them. In these peril journeys across the sea, the disciples are crossing between the Gentile shore and the Jewish shore. The miracles Jesus has performed for the Jews, he repeats for the Gentile, the bread he multiplies in the land of the Jews, he also multiplies for the gentiles. The crossing Jesus orders are intended to bring reconciliation between these religious enemies. Jesus, the disciples, and the church are on a mission of reconciliation. The storms which oppose them, are the storms of a prejudice and hatred which resist reconciliation.

In our baptism, we enter the boat with the other disciples of Jesus. In our baptism, Jesus commands us to join the journey of reconciliation. Come through the water, come into the boat, cross the sea and carry on the work Jesus has begun. He commands us to enter and go to the other side. He commands us to carry on the journeys of reconciliation that are needed in the world. The reconciliations today are between Jew, and Arab and Christian. The reconciliations are between Buddhist, Moslem, Christian, Hindu and Jew. Reconciliation is needed between nations, between races, between rich and poor, between gay and straight, young and old, between humankind and the environment. The journeys of reconciliation are journeys across wild seas in the face of adverse winds. We make so little headway no matter how hard we strain. The promise of the Gospel is that Jesus joins us in the journey. He is with us in the boat. He will calm the seas and bring us to the shore safely.

We are back from our vacation. Back from the time relaxing in our rustic time share on the shore of Lake Michigan. Our time in the cabin is past. Now its time to get into the boat. The storms may be rough, the winds blow against us. Headway seems so slow. The journey of reconciliation continues.