

Six years ago my family and I took a trip of a lifetime to Maine to go sailing for 2 weeks on a 40 foot boat. Seemed like a good idea. Both girls love to sail, Matt grew up on a sailboat and Matt and I had sailed larger boats several times before. So we chartered a 40 boat and off we set. Our plan was to sail around Mount Desert Island, stopping in to several different ports to check out the ports, pick up some lobster and just enjoy being on the water. So we loaded up, spent a day sailing around the marina to make sure we had a feel of the boat and then headed off. It sounded like a great plan, until we got to our first port that the sailing guide book said was amazing, except that the guidebook was a couple years old and hadn't been updated. We were looking forward to fresh chowder and lobster rolls only to find a scene out of a Stephen King novel just as the fog rolled in. After a night of trying to figure out where to go next we set off just as the boats headed out to check the lobster pots.

This all seemed like a normal day of sailing, except and it's that the way it always is, except we didn't take into account two teeny tiny things – what time was high tide and that we happened to be sailing in the middle of a super moon. Now the high tide alone would have been fine but the super moon meant that the current and the waves were stronger and higher. Those are the two key points the waves were stronger and higher and it started to rain. So while a 40 foot boat seems like a large vessel when you are in the midst of swells it's kinda more like a cork bobbing in the water. Not necessarily the scenic sail we had hoped for. I was pretty sure that both of my daughter's would hate sailing and we still had 12 days of this trip. We kept on until we finally could put into a small island, population 70.

One of the earliest symbols of Christianity was the boat. This symbol stood for the Church tossed on the sea of disbelief, worldliness and persecution, but finally reaching safe harbor with its cargo of human souls.

This symbol had its origins in narratives such as the Gospel of today. Having fishermen as disciples, familiar with the sea, made it easier for Jesus to gain access to one of these many boats. It is these boats that Jesus used as a pulpit as he spoke to the crowds on the beach, or as Jesus crisscrossed the Galilean Sea.

Make no mistake; the Galilean Sea for all its idyllic beauty had the potential to become a fisherman's nightmare, enough to wreck the nerves of experienced fishermen such as Jesus' disciples. The Gospel records the condition of the sea on this occasion as 'basanizo', translated as 'tortured or harassed'. Matthew narrates two such tempestuous incidents; in Chapter 8:23-27 and here in 14:22-36.

There is a marked difference in the two texts. In the former text, Jesus is in the boat; here Jesus is not; he comes walking to them. In the first there is a storm, here the wind and waves were against them. In the first they feared for their lives; here they are terrified because they think they see a ghost. It is the 'little faith' of the disciples that is in question in the first incident; now it is Peter's little faith that is under the microscope.

For Matthew's community there is no need for interpretation. They lived in the throes of persecution from within and everywhere, and the meaning was quite clear. At question was Jesus' claim that he was the Son of God, a claim rejected by the Jews both at Jesus' time and during the time Matthew wrote the Gospel. Then there was also the reality of their 'little faith' that was tossed about as a consequence of their isolation from the Jewish community.

The message to Matthew's community is clear, hang in there and take heart. The community of Matthew must battle the storm as the disciples did, through a long dark night, knowing that just as for the disciples, so also for Matthew's community, the Lord will come at the break of dawn

It is the assuring voice of Jesus that Matthew's persecuted community hears, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Jesus reveals himself as the great "I am". Often we get distracted by Peter's faithful few steps and even more so by his "little faith" sinking. But there in his rescue of Peter, Jesus steps on to the boat to a public acknowledgement of the disciples. For the first time in Matthew's Gospel, they see him, all twelve of them, as the Son of God and they worship him. Matthew's community stands consoled.

We aren't much different from Matthew's community. While we might not be living in the midst of persecution we are in the midst of our own storm. This pandemic has physically cut us off from our community, the waves of this disease rise and fall and the other side of the lake is a far way off.

The message to Matthew's community is the message to us and it is clear, as true today as it was centuries ago – hang in there and take heart. We too need to battle the storm as the disciples did, through a long dark night, that the Lord walk to us in the midst of the storm.

The one thing I learned a long time ago from growing up on boats is that if you start feeling sick, it helps to get up from below and find the horizon, even if the horizon is just the edge of the sea with no land in sight. That day in Maine, so many years ago, was a day that we just had to ride out the waves and the wind. We couldn't get to land any faster than we were. I'd lie if I didn't admit there were moments were I was scared. I spent most of the trip down in the

galley with a child that didn't make it up on deck to watch the horizon. I'm not prone to sea sickness but being stuck below was making that difficult. Luckily there was a mirror on the back of a door that I could see the sky in the reflection and rather than watching the water levels go up and down in the port windows – I keep my eyesight on that view of the sky.

The disciples on that boat had no idea what trials and struggles that faced them ahead and yet they knew one thing, they knew that their rabbi, their friend was God's Son. We stand on the other side of an empty tomb and we know that this water walking man is the very embodiment of God's presence in the world – Emmanuel. God is with us.

God is with us in the midst of this storm, God is with us in the midst of the struggles of this world, God is with us as we strive to see each person as a reflection of this God that we created in the image of. God is with us, reaching out to pull us out of the water, out of the chaos of the storm. "Take heart, it is I do not be afraid." It is with that that we can place our trust and hope as we go through this storm, that Jesus walks It is with that that we can trust and hope that in the midst of this storm Jesus walks to us.