

When Peter begins to sink as he tries to walk on the water toward Jesus he cries, “Lord, save me!” Peter doesn’t say “Jesus, help me.” Though Jesus may chide him for his little faith when he gets overwhelmed by the winds and the wave, Peter’s cry is really a prayer rooted in faith. Jesus stands by as more than a companion. Jesus is present as the one who saves.

Whether you venture out to swim in the deep waters or have the unfortunate experience of beginning to sink, it makes all the difference in the world to know that someone is there for you. You are not alone. Jesus was there and Jesus is there.

Jesus brings Peter safely into the boat with the other disciples. The winds cease. Jesus is in the boat with them. Not only does Jesus save Peter, but Jesus puts Peter into the boat with the rest of the company of disciples. You see, Jesus saves us from being swallowed up by death, but Jesus doesn’t stop there. Jesus saves us not just from something but *for something*, placing us in the boat with other sisters and brothers in the community of faith. We are not alone and we journey in faith, called to bear witness to God’s saving activity.

For centuries, the image of a ship or a boat has been a symbol for the church. Inspired by this and many other biblical stories where God conquers the dark and stormy waters, it’s a good way to describe what God calls the church to be. In fact, this space where you are all sitting today is called the nave. Nave comes from a Latin word that means “ship.”

I like the image of a boat or a ship because it says that Jesus’ church is on the move, not nailed down or fastened to the ground but a vessel in movement on the sea. And we are in the boat with other sisters and brothers, knowing the safety discovered in Christian community for Jesus is right there with us.

The ship or boat sometimes faces stormy weather. At times, the waves are ominous and the wind is fierce and we are tossed about and battered. Sailing on the sea can be a dangerous thing but we take the risk, letting go of fear, venturing forth where God leads us. We need not splash around in the shallow end. We need not fear. Jesus is there.

This is where the church is called to be – out in the deep end. Sailing on the stormy seas can be very stormy but the call remains the same: to bear witness to God’s reign of justice in what we say and in what we do. At times the storm is so great and the risk is so high, we may find ourselves getting in trouble just like Jesus did. I find that often happens when we find ourselves in a position of speaking truth to power.

Did you hear the news over the weekend? It's been quite a storm. The Governor of Virginia declared a state of emergency. White nationalists or white supremacists staged a demonstration in Charlottesville because they want to "take back America." People were hurt and at least one person is reported dead. There is something scarier going on here and let's name it for what it is: pure, unreconstructed racism. I was stunned to see a cadre of white men in this crowd with their arms raised in the posture of a Nazi salute. Stunned and saddened. The white nationalists, aided by the Ku Klux Klan, waved the confederate flag, bore swastikas, and shouted racist slogans. The sin of racism on full display.

What is the church called to do in times such as these? Where does the ship sail? Well, in times like these it seems to me that when witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ we must, first, name the bad news. The good news is that God loves the world and that the deepest desire of God's heart is the reconciliation of all people and all things. To appreciate the good news, we must always identify the bad news. And the bad news is that principalities or powers are at work in the world. Sin infects every human heart. Evil poisons every system. We must name it, especially when it is blatant.

If the church finds itself tossed to and fro by the waves and battered about it is because when we speak of God's alternate word of justice and mercy, we bear witness to a kingdom that is alien to the powers that be. You will not always be very popular and you might even find yourself in trouble when you speak the good news of Jesus.

For many weeks now, a group of dedicated sisters and brothers in the parish have been meeting to study and pray and discern these matters using a study produced by the ELCA, called *Troubling the Waters*, a guide to help understand the systemic reality of racism, the sin of racism, and the reality of white privilege. These folks have asked you to join them in reading *Tears We Cannot Stop* by Pastor Michael Eric Dyson. We will be discussing the book on August 23rd and if you're interested please check the box on your *Count Me In* Form.

I have been buoyed by the courage and faithfulness of this group. At times they have made me wildly uncomfortable. They have sought to focus on primary matters and help us all become aware of "what we have done and left undone." Such awareness will not fix the problem of racism. Only God can overcome sin. Yet, having these kinds of conversations and testifying in what we say and do to God's alternate reign of justice is no small thing. At its best, these sorts of ventures into God's reign of justice help us lean even deeper into the Spirit of Christ and the things of God's kingdom. We're called to be in the boat together and venture out into the deep.

Now, this is important. As the church, we participate in God's mission not as ideologues. We are called Christian, not Democrat or Republican or those who subscribe to any "ism." God has not set us into the world to compete or be right or to conquer with a sword. These sorts of things are marks of the systems we renounce at baptism.

If we are to follow Jesus, then we act in non-violent ways and we dare to be honest – that hatred infects every human heart. All of us. With God's help, we seek to love all people and have conversations not only among ourselves but with neighbors and especially with those with whom we disagree.

The church often prefers to play in the shallow end where there is little or no risk. That's where I like to hang out sometimes, but the restless Spirit of God will not have it so. One of things I love about PRLC is that this congregation is all about mission. Our discernment process has identified areas where we feel the pull of God calling us to venture out beyond ourselves in areas of justice, loving our neighbors, being in friendship with other faith communities, and seeking to strengthen our ministry in daily life. To be conscious of God's movement in the world requires work and paying attention and deep discernment and an action that is consistent with the one we worship and call Lord. We are called to speak and act honestly and plainly and do so in love.

If it feels scary to fulfill, with God's help, the promises of our baptismal covenant, to ...

- Proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ by word and deed
- Serve all people, following the example of Jesus
- And to strive for justice and peace in all the world

... well, that's to be expected. Still, we venture forth into the deep waters where God is calling us. There are always rocky rides and fierce winds and stormy weather but we need not be afraid. Jesus says: "Take heart. It is I, do not be afraid."

When the storms hit and chaos runs wild, we may want to duck or hide or wish it all goes away, but the one who saves us in and through the turbulence calls us to speak the truth in love and bear witness to the just Kingdom of God.

Do not be afraid. We're all in the same boat and Jesus is right there with us. Amen.