

Job 38:1-11  
Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32  
2 Corinthians 6: 1-13  
Mark 4: 35-41.

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### **The Back of the Boat**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

The disciples didn't know what they were in for. Certain death, it seemed. As fishermen, they knew a thing or two about the sea although things got so bad so fast anyone in that boat would have shared their panic, their doom.

And there was Jesus. Lulled to sleep in the back of the boat. Sleeping soundly after an exhausting day of preaching.

“Don't you care that we are perishing!” It is the heart's most primal, most tender cry. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Certain death. Abandonment. It's galvanizing when fear takes over us. And it surely will, over and over again in our lives as our own little boats are torpedoed by trauma, loss, sickness, discrimination, betrayals, abuse, and all the catastrophes that can come our way that can take us right under the waves. Full stop.

“Perfect faith casts out fear”? Whoever wrote or translated that got it wrong. Faith and fear live in a constant tug-of-war in our lives. Rarely are they ever strange bedfellows.

In fact, “Do not be afraid” is often the angels' opening line: Mary hears it from the Angel Gabriel, as does Joseph when the angel tells him in a dream not to be afraid to marry Mary. Fast forward to the empty tomb: the women are afraid and told to “Fear not. He is not here.”

But he was in the back of the boat and the disciples woke him up. They were desperate to be saved—and they were—but that was hardly the end of their story—their fear was not over—it escalated when the winds and waves ceased. “Who is this man that even the wind and sea obey him?”

I doubt any of you think of Jesus as an abracadabra God. Presto change. Your faith is deeper than that. Embraces the mystery because isn't that where we find ourselves over and over again?

I surely did as an oncology chaplain. I remember a mother with whom I prayed almost daily for months who asked me point blank when her son died, 'Why wasn't my faith strong enough?'

Years later, I don't remember exactly what I said but I am sure I spoke about the mystery of faith and reassured her that her son did not because of her lack of faith. I likely said even though her son wasn't cured of his leukemia, he was healed in Christ's love.

Many months later, this mom told me she had a dream in which she saw her son—whose name was Angel—leading souls who died because of their addictions-- from purgatory into heaven and this had brought meaning and peace to her about his death.

This brings us to trust, oddly enough which is one way to frame this story. We have all been in the back of the boat in our lives as the storm raged, fearful that we are doomed and worried that God is nowhere.

But here's a reminder from Nadia Bolz-Weber, author and pastor:

“You're sure you are perishing...but when you look back on it 6 months or a year later after everything worked out or didn't but you are still alive and the world didn't end and you think “I don't know why I was so freaked out...” well, I want some day to get to the point where I can trust God in the moment and not just in retrospect. Maybe things will work out, maybe they won't - but I can either have a sense of God's love during the whole thing, or I can be so freaked out I forget it's there.<sup>1</sup>

That turns the tables on us, doesn't it? How easy it is, how human, to assume that we are alone when the dark clouds that descend over us and when our leaky little boats are filling up fast with water in the howling wind, that God is nowhere near. Least of all in the back of the boat. Bolz-Weber again who says:

Here's what I believe: the Triune God, whose love is powerful enough to raise Christ from the dead, simply will not be separated from me or from you. Not by a storm, not by a crisis, not by a pandemic, not by a war and not even by death. What I mean is, the love of God in Christ may not separate us from the storm ... but the storm cannot, shall not, will not separate us from God's love.

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<sup>1</sup> Bolz-Weber, The Corners, Freaking “The Hell Out,” an essay on Fear and Faith, 2/25/2022

We stare through a glass darkly and I do trust one day we will see face-to-face. But for now, our vision is limited. Just as it was for the women at the tomb who were terrified when it was empty.

But they stayed with where the pain was and everything changed. Jesus was there but in a way that had been impossible in human history to ever imagine before:

In closing, these prayerful words from the author and theologian, the late Rev. Frederick Buechner who reminds us:

“Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us. And whatever we do, in whatever time we have left, wherever we go, may we in whatever way we can, call on him, as the fishermen did in their boat, call on him to come awake within us and to give us courage, to give us hope, to show each one of us our way. May he be with us especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we are done, so that even in their midst we may find peace, even in their midst we may find him.”<sup>2</sup>

AMEN.

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark*, “A 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday Prayer”