

June 20, 2021

First things first: greetings to all the Dads here today: it's Father's Day! Congratulations to you and hope your day is great. But greetings also to everyone who has had a Dad, which is all of us. Where would we be without our fathers? We owe them a lot. So we give thanks for them all, and pray God's special guidance and grace for those who have the vocation of fatherhood, for a blessing on their incredibly important work.

And now on to our lessons: it's a real coincidence for me personally that they have so much in them about boats and water. I was out on the water on Flathead Lake just last week, all day Thursday and Friday. I was taking a two-day course for a basic sailing certificate. Why, you may wonder? The Episcopal summer camp on Flathead Lake, Camp Marshall, is considering adding a sailing program next year. We'll see what happens, it is all at a very initial stage. But maybe I can make a contribution, it's something I have a little experience with, but first I needed to refresh my skills.

Anyway: our instructor last week, a very experienced sailor, said something that really struck me. He has sailed around the world, been on boats in 30 different countries, and has many many stories about the sea, and here's what he said: "When sailors talk among themselves," he said, "and tell stories, we never talk about the beautiful days and the smooth sailing. The stories we tell are always the disasters and near misses and when we almost drowned. It's the mistakes and the terrifying storms we live through that we want to talk about."

And from my own much less extensive experience I would agree that this is indeed true. I can remember *every detail* of times I have been in dangerous old-of-control situations on the water. Fortunately, there have not been too many! The author of Psalm 107 must have had some difficult moments at sea also, because he puts it so well, describing sailors who:

Mounted up to the heavens and fell back to the depths; *
their hearts melted because of their peril.
They reeled and staggered like drunkards *
and were at their wits' end.

It is the storms that get and hold your attention at sea. An hour or two of fear and anguish in a windstorm teaches more than days on end of balmy weather and gently lapping waves.

This is true of our lives too, isn't it? I mean, I've had plenty of happy moments in my life. But it has been the times when things did not work out as planned that have made me begin to see more deeply into myself, and into the hard but potentially grace-filled facts of life.

There is a phrase about this: it's called, "a teachable moment." A teachable moment is when a person's mind and heart are receptive, because something in their situation makes it impossible to hide from what is going on. In a teachable moment, you see clearly what was right there in front of you all along, but somehow you didn't notice. Afterwards, you wonder, how did I miss that for so long? It is amazing that you didn't see it, because now

it is all so clear. Such insight and growth are what happens when a teachable moment is used to good advantage.

Jesus' disciples had a teachable moment one night, out in a boat on the water, crossing a lake. A violent windstorm came up. Now they had seen Jesus in action before: there had been healings and castings out of demons. They had heard him preach, and like everyone else who heard Jesus, they came away amazed at the way he put words together. Why, they had even given up their day jobs, and left their families behind to become Jesus' closest followers. Even so, what happened during that storm took their breath away. It left them wondering if hitherto they had understood anything at all. "Who then is this," they asked, "that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Not just curing individuals here or there; not just saying a wise word in a sermon; no, this was big. This was cosmic. Even the wind and the sea obey him: so, who then is this? You can just feel the wheels turning in their brains. It was a teachable moment! Thanks to that storm, the disciples glimpsed how much more they still had to learn about Jesus.

So one thing we can gather from this little story is that when it comes to our teachable moments—times when we suddenly see more clearly into God and who God is—life's difficult moments can actually be pretty helpful. We don't like difficult moments. We prefer calm and beauty. But just ask yourself: when have you learned the most about yourself and about life? Was it when everything was clear and sunny? Or when out of the blue all heck broke loose, and you failed to maintain control, and were bobbing around helplessly?

I think I know how St Paul would answer. Let's spend a minute with the part of his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, our epistle for today. Paul faced many out of control moments. He lists them for us: "afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger." And yet these teachable moments are what made Paul into the amazing spiritual leader that—for all his foibles—he most certainly was. Amid the hardships and afflictions and beatings and imprisonments and riots, Paul repeatedly experienced Christ right there with him, sharing it all, and seeing him through to fight another day. These lived experiences brought Paul to a place of spiritual resilience: "We are treated as impostors," he wrote, "and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see--we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

That's what it looks like when a person takes advantage of the teachable moments life brings our way. Beat up, but more alive than ever; having nothing, yet possessing everything.

There is one more part to that storm on the lake we have not yet discussed. To me it is the most puzzling part: the fact that Jesus was asleep in the stern during the storm. "The waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion."

How in the world could anyone sleep through all that? Water flying everywhere, the boat starting to sink, the wind howling, yet: there he is, out

like a light: Jesus asleep on the stern during the storm. If they hadn't shaken him awake, he would have snoozed through the whole thing. If I had been there, and observed this, my question would have been, "Who then is this, that he can sleep through a storm in an open boat on the sea?"

Well, our first lesson supplies the answer. That lesson was from the book of Job, in the Old Testament. In it God describes God's work in Creation: laying the foundations of the earth; laying its cornerstone; confining the sea to its proper bounds, and dressing it up with clouds and darkness. Notably, God spoke from a whirlwind to say all this.

So there is the solution to the question: Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him? Well, the one through whom the worlds were made in the first place. That's who. That's what we say in the Creed each week, right? "Through him all things were made." Who is this, that can sleep while the boat is getting swamped? Well, the one who is the place of calm at the center of the hurricane; the still point at the center of the whole universe. Understanding this made it all worthwhile for the disciples amid the storm.

This is deep stuff. It is difficult to wrap our heads around. But does point us in a helpful direction if it encourages us to make the most of the teachable moments that come our way in life. We are never going to like being out in the storms. But they can have a silver lining: we might just hear Jesus saying: "Peace! Be still."

And wouldn't that be a story to tell, when we next swap yarns with our fellow voyagers on the journey we call life!