

It's not like the disciples were surprised. That's what I don't understand about this morning's gospel. Why were they so afraid of a storm? These men were raised on these waters, they most likely had lived through worse storms. Why then were they beside themselves with fear? Like I said, storms were not a new thing for them. What do I mean by this? Well, here's a bit of a geography lesson for you, with a meteorological one thrown in for good measure.

The Sea of Galilee, for starters, isn't really a sea. It's a freshwater lake, hence it sometimes being called Lake Gennesaret or Lake Tiberias throughout the ages. It is fed primarily by the Jordan river and runoff from the surrounding mountains. Located roughly 700 feet below sea level, it is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. It is also surrounded by the Galilean hills that reach up to 1400 feet above sea level to the west and the mountains of the Golan Heights to the east that span more than 2500 feet. This unique situation creates unique weather patterns, namely, cool air coming off the mountains to the east will mix with the warm air covering the lake and spawn sudden and sometimes violent storms, especially at night. So, considering that a handful of Jesus' disciples were called off the very

boats they were riding in today's gospel lesson, the possibility remains that either the storm that suddenly arose was particularly fierce, or something else was going on altogether. For today's purpose, I am going to propose the latter.

"On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." When you read back a chapter or two, you'll remember that this comes on the heels of a tremendous sea change for his disciples, or apostles as Mark calls them. So you have Simon and Andrew, James and John, who have left their boats to follow Jesus and the crowds are already becoming something amazing. They can't travel anywhere without an entire mob following him, bringing the sick and tormented for healing, or the powers that be challenging Him at every turn. Overwhelmed by these crowds, Jesus has resorted to speaking to the masses from a boat put off the shore so he can breathe and they can hear. The other eight apostles have been appointed now and Jesus begins talking at length in parables to an astounded crowd. For two days basically, Jesus has been teaching from the shore and since they can't travel home as the crowds won't disperse, and then? Jesus says, "let's go to the other side." What he means is, let's go to Gentile country.

So you couple the incalculable upheaval of the apostle's lives in recent days, the ever-lingering fear of evening squalls in the back of the minds of these former fishermen, and then sprinkle in the anxiety of going to gentile country and you have, for lack of a better term, a perfect storm. Simply put, these guys are exhausted and cannot get any break to speak of and are now being asked to go waayy outside of their comfort zone. I think it is this anxiety and exhaustion that speaks when they clamor to the back of the boat to confront their sleeping savior. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" You can hear fear and tiredness in their voice. You can't help but wonder if they are questioning what exactly it is they have signed up for. So imagine their reaction to hearing a groggy Jesus turn to them and say, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" Um, excuse me? I don't know about you but it would have been hard for me, had I been there to not suggest he swim the rest of the way. Just sayin'.

And doesn't my imaginary response nicely encapsulate and embody where we are right now in this country? Because isn't it easy to say, "I'm done with you?" What I think we suffer from right now as a nation, even as a church in many ways, is a debilitating lack of imagination, curiosity, and empathy. Jesus calls us, beckons us to go to the other side, especially

when we think we know what and who's there already. This isn't easy. And it's not supposed to be. In the age of heightened sensitivity and the prevalence of "I'll just block what I don't like or don't agree with on social media" sentiment, we insulate ourselves from that which makes us uncomfortable. We no longer try and meet people where they are or even ask where they are coming from. That's what I mean by a lack of imagination, curiosity, and empathy. I'm guilty of it. We all are. It's too easy to find solace on the shores of our own ideals and worldview and not risk the waters between us and the other side.

When we become so isolated from one another, when we prioritize our side or our cause over our relationships with one another, you know, the very relationships we inherit from Jesus himself, can we really be surprised that in this day and age we are arguing the merits or virtue of separating children from their parents? I'm not bringing this up to highlight as the paragon of whatever one side over the other because the truth is we have all dropped the ball allowing it to come to this. Lack of imagination, curiosity, and empathy, to a T.

Back in the boat, Jesus didn't say "there's nothing to be afraid of," he said "don't be afraid." There's a big difference. He pushed back on the

apostles who in their fear lashed out at him. He trusted them in their domain to get him safely across, so much so he caught a nap on the way. They couldn't return the favor. They questioned the very relationship he had with them, why else would they have questioned whether he cared or not that they were perishing. And there's the key. Relationship. From the outset of Jesus' ministry, He knew his reach would go far beyond his own community. He knew there would be storms. He calls us to rediscover and re-engage those on the other side, for when we reach out to see Christ in the "other" the storms and squalls that toss us about seem less terrifying, if we like his apostles have faith. Because He is with us. When we act in love, with empathy for and toward one another we are looking at the world through Jesus' eyes. The love that sees us through storms of our own making and storms we can't control is the same love that compelled Jesus to cross to the other side, to share the love of God with those who had for whatever reason had been deemed not worthy. Jesus had something to say about that. And so must we.