



## BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 23, 2024

Reflection by Susan Quaintance, OSB

First Reading - Jb 38: 1, 8-11

Second Reading - 2Cor 5: 14-17

Gospel - Mark 4: 35-41

It's not too big a stretch to apply today's scriptures to the situation that we, as a community and probably as individuals, find ourselves in at this moment in history. Despite the seemingly normal and mundane appearance of our days, there is plenty of storm and chaos. We are in the midst of big things – some of which are under our control and plenty of which are not. As most storms are, this time is unsettling, disquieting, and frightening.

It also seems pretty obvious what I'm supposed to take away from this gospel story. "Trust in Jesus. He's powerful enough to calm even the stormiest sea." And if I'm not calm, that's a reflection on my weak and underdeveloped faith.

Well, I may, indeed, have weak and underdeveloped faith, because that didn't feel like enough to make a homily out of or to soothe my own jangled nerves.

So I tried to spend some time with those disciples in the boat with Jesus. There are a couple differences between this story in the gospel of Mark from how it's told in Matthew and Luke, and I let those differences lead me. First of all, in Mark, getting into the boat was at the disciples' initiative, not Jesus'. Yes, he says, "Let us go to the other side" – this, after spending the day in a boat off the shore, teaching the crowd. But the next line is "Leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was." In Matthew and Luke, it just says, "He got into a boat."

Another variation in Mark's version is the tone of the disciples when they wake Jesus up when the storm gets bad. In the other synoptic versions, the disciples don't ask a question; they just say (probably very emphatically) "We are perishing." Here, they announce that, too, but it's wrapped in a question that's a pretty clear rebuke of Jesus, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" So I thought about those differences.

First, the getting into the boat thing. I wonder if the disciples were "taking Jesus along" as sort of a talisman, a token to protect them in storms on the sea and in the storms of their lives. Maybe they, consumed with their own plans and agendas, rushed him along; after all, he was "just as he was." They hustled him into the boat: no time to grab something to eat or sit down a second or chat with that last person. Gotta go!

Do I do that? Have I assumed that nothing really hard is going to happen to me because I've tried to live a life of faith and purpose? Have I treated Jesus as a good luck charm or tent pole for a shelter of magical thinking? Do I take the time to attend to the self-giving model of Jesus,

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or do I push him where I need him to be? Probably not consciously but perhaps somewhere in my many less-than-aware moments, yes.

And the snotty question? Oh, I'm all in on that one. My mother didn't say "Tone of voice" what felt like thousands of times to me throughout my childhood for no reason. I am perfectly capable of the distrust and resentfulness shown by the disciples in the boat. It's not just that they (and I) want to be saved; we want Jesus to feel bad for not noticing that we need to be saved sooner. Geez.

But I think the message I'm taking away today is that all of that is fine, maybe even expected, accepted, and embraced by God. No, not maybe. Expected, accepted, and embraced by God. Because the other thing that these scriptures present is that God is always present in the chaos. In our first reading from Job, God "speaks out of a storm." And whether the disciples pushed Jesus into the boat before he was ready or not, he's there. With them. With us. That presence doesn't prevent the storm from happening. It may not even keep us from being our human, messy, contradictory, contrary, and confusing selves. But we are not alone. There's comfort in that. And maybe today, that's all the point I need.