

The English Cleric and Theologian John Wesley, known as the founder of the Methodist movement in the Church of England, could hardly have been called a faint-hearted stay-at-home recluse. And yet you might say that there were times when even he lost his nerve and wished he had stayed put. Apparently during one of Wesley's many Atlantic crossings, a frighteningly fierce storm broke out, and the ship he was sailing on was tossed about like a bathtub toy in the water with a toddler.

While Wesley and other terrified passengers clung to their bunks and hid their heads, a community of Moravians, traveling to their new homeland, calmly gathered to hold their daily worship service and sing praises to God. While watching the Moravians, so apparently unperturbed by the howling winds and crashing waves, Wesley realized he was witnessing a truly waterproof faith. From that moment on, John Wesley prayed that God would give him the ability to likewise ride out the storms of life with as much confidence.

So, what do you think made those Moravians so calm and peaceful in the face of such a terrible tempest? Most likely it was the same trait that the disciples so woefully lacked in today's gospel story: an unquenchable trust in Jesus Christ. Which begs the question, if you were in a boat in a raging sea, who would you trust? Who would you want to be there with you? Would you rather have sailors who have a lifelong understanding of traveling on the water in your midst or an itinerant rabbi sleeping in the hold with you?

Isn't this the same dilemma we face? A Pastor named Kevin McHarg of First Christian Church in Benton, Kentucky, puts this more succinctly when he asks, "Are we willing and ready to trust a sleeping Jesus? When we are at the doctor's office awaiting a diagnosis, are we willing to trust a sleeping Jesus? When we're in the middle of a bitter dispute, are we willing to trust a sleeping Jesus? When we're making a change in our career paths, are we willing to trust a sleeping Jesus? When challenged by our failure to serve God beyond our own needs and interests, are we willing to trust a sleeping Jesus?"

A Jesus on the road to Jerusalem we might be able to trust. A Jesus opening the eyes of the blind we might be able to trust. A Jesus teaching the Torah to a crowd on a hillside we might be able to trust. A Jesus rebuking the Pharisees we might be able to trust. But — a

sleeping Jesus? I'm not quite sure about that. I think like the disciples our faith comes from witnessing Christ's actions and the ways we experience His presence and peace during the storms we find ourselves facing in life.

Notice that after stretching out his arms and stilling the storm, Jesus turns to his companions and chastises them. By cowardly cringing and crying out to Jesus in fear, they had revealed the shallowness of their faith. Although they had been specially chosen and handpicked as Jesus' fellow travelers on this journey, they appear to have missed the boat.

After all, what could have been more exciting and thrilling than witnessing the miracle of Jesus' calming the storm? Perhaps the miracle Jesus actually wanted to show them was not the miracle of calming the storm itself, but the miracle of calming them in the storm. Which brings us back to the faith of the Moravian travelers I mentioned earlier. They demonstrated to John Wesley that faith recognizes that with Jesus there is no storm too fierce, no opponent too great, no crisis too complete. The disciples lost out on an opportunity to experience the jubilation, the sheer exhilaration that could have been theirs had they had the courage to ride the waves of that storm with Jesus. Instead, their timidity and their anxiety forced him to shut down the ride and sail them into port.

Which begs the question, how many of us have voluntarily dry-docked our faith? How many of us keep land-locked for safety's sake? If a few of us do venture out on the water, it is usually only to paddle about in the shallows -- afraid to sail too far away from land, where the current might grab us and take us off in unknown directions. And what do we have to be afraid of? While the disciples did have the advantage of witnessing firsthand the power of Jesus to heal, they did not yet have the experience of witnessing Christ's death and resurrection to buoy up or increase their courage.

After all, the resurrection of Jesus teaches us we no longer need to fear anything, not even death itself. So, what is keeping us spiritually anchored in safe, snug harbors? Are we, perhaps, more afraid of becoming failures than of becoming fatalities? Are we more afraid of living than we are afraid of dying?

If Jesus came to give us an abundant life, it is safe to assume that Jesus doesn't want us to keep only to the narrow paths of life, the "tried and true." Think about it, Jesus kept moving throughout his ministry, always pushing the disciples along to the next community or grabbing a boat to journey to a new shore. Jesus doesn't call us to only live within our limits. Jesus calls us to live into our limits. That is the continuing call of the church -- to go everywhere, be everywhere, to hit the road and sail the seven seas. How else can the church fulfill the directive Jesus gave in his great commission to "go to the ends of the earth?"

The miracle story of Jesus' calming the storm at sea testifies to at least two truths. First, as the divine Son of God, there is nothing Jesus cannot do to keep us from ultimate harm. Second, as Jesus' disciples living in a sinful, imperfect world, we are in for some rough times. Our gospel story this evening confirms that the boat in which Jesus and his disciples found themselves in went through a real storm, a real actual threat.

Keep in mind, though, that the storm in the story doesn't blow around or avoid the boat just because Jesus is on board. No... it hits them full force. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus promise his followers anything different. After all, a peaceful voyage is not necessarily the ticket Christians travel on or with. But a peace-filled journey, with Christ always present, is. And as we continue to observe the season of Lent let us never forget the promise of Christ. Although he doesn't sail us around every storm that comes our way, he does promise he is always with us and will bring us through all storms in one peace. Amen.