

Proper 14A RCL
Trinity, Bend
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28
Ps 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b
Romans 10: 5-15
Matthew 14: 22-33

Many, many years ago when I was living in Milwaukee, WI my friend and I bought a 24-ft. sailboat. We had taken the boat out for a few short trips of about an hour or so, when we decided to take our maiden voyage for an overnight down to Racine, WI, about 25 miles south. Things were beautiful going down. We slept on the boat and the next day after visiting with friends, we decided to sail back.

As we were sailing back a big storm blew up out of the northeast. Which meant we could not make any headway. Not only that the boat was listing so much to the side that the waves were coming over the deck.

The captain told me to go up and lower the jib. So, I tried to go forward to do so, not wearing a life jacket or a safety harness. I had to hold on to whatever rail I could find and do my best to stay on the boat. Knowing that being in very high choppy waves in ice cold water would not be a good situation.

When I finally made it to the mast, scared to death I hung on to the mast and looked up. It was there that I saw that the spreader made a cross with the mast. That cross gave me the hope that I would live.

As I was hanging on to the mast, I pulled the line for the main sail and not the jib, which could have made things worse. But I didn't really care. I just knew I was going to live.

After that we motored back to Racine, anchored the boat and had our friends drive us back to Milwaukee.

We found out later that this small boat carried too much sail for the quick to blow up, choppy storms on Lake Michigan. And the sailing

races that were planned for Milwaukee that day were canceled due to the weather. But we didn't have a weather radio so we did not know that.

I think my fear was something like the disciples in that boat when Jesus came walking on the water. They were experienced fishermen and had been in many storms before but they had never seen a ghost walking on water before. Imagine their fear. They didn't have a goodnight's sleep and now they're seeing a ghost.

But note that bold Peter questions Jesus, "If it is you command me to come to you." Jesus replies, "Come." So, Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. He's doing fine until he loses his focus on Jesus and becomes afraid, then he begins to sink.

Now we all have fears. The thing we often fear the most is change. It could be large or small change. We're used to doing things a certain way and if we change, things will not be the same. It will require us to do something differently.

Sometimes those changes are of our own doing and sometimes they are thrust upon us by something outside of our control.

When your boss says, "I no longer can use you. Our business is down." You probably had nothing to do with that but the fear of how am I going to live? How will I support my family can be paralyzing.

When the doctor says, "I'm concerned about your lab results. We need to do more testing." Fear can take over with all kinds of "what ifs."

The other thing that happens with fear is that it tempts us to find our own solutions, to rely on false wisdom, to act without guidance, trust or hope. When we invite God into the decision-making process we get closer to God's wisdom.

Let me give you an example, when I was considering retiring. I worked with my Spiritual Director and decided to take a year to make a decision. Now this was new for me. I usually make major life decisions in about a month or less.

But I had a definite fear. I had worked full time since I was 22. I always moved from job to job and my life was defined in many ways by my job.

During that time, I was invited to attend CREDO, an 8-day conference for clergy to look at their own lives. During the first part of the conference, we were loaded with information.

Finally, on the 6th or 7th day we were given a quiet day. So, I decided to walk around the lake. I didn't go very far when I found an aeration pond. In this quiet place there were flowers, and a bench and a fountain in the middle of the pond. So, I decide to sit a while.

As I enjoyed my time on the bench, I was watching the fountain. I noticed there was a slight breeze. So, when the water shot up in the air, the drops would sparkle in the sun and then fall in a different place each time.

During that time, the Holy Spirit gave me the idea that I could be like those drops. The drops got their energy from God and God gave them a purpose. They didn't know what that purpose was.

Retirement would allow that. Sparkling in the sun and falling in a different place each time. I didn't need to know what I was going to do.

Fear can effect groups also. I've talked with a number of people in Bend who are wondering, "What are we going to do with all the people coming to view the eclipse?" I've heard many times, "What if someone accidently starts a forest fire?" You can sense the underlying fear in their voices.

Well there are a few things we can do to deal with the projected crowds. We can stock up on things like groceries, prescriptions, and gas early in the week. Then we can plan things to do at home.

Or if we have to go somewhere like work or come to church next Sunday (you may want to come at 8, when there will probably less traffic) leave in plenty of time so the extra traffic won't seem so bad. Be sure to carry extra water and snacks in your car.

Be sure to be safe. Be sure to have enough certified eclipse glasses for all the members of your family, since we will probably be tempted to look up during the few minutes of the eclipse.

If someone does start a forest or brush fire, we have to trust that those who have created the emergency preparedness plan have done their job well and will be able to handle the situation.

With a good attitude we can have fun and enjoy this event that hasn't happen for 38 years in the US and won't happen again for a long, long time. With planning, patience and politeness, we can get through this.

We learned how to live with way too much snow for a number of months last winter. We can live with what will seem like too many people for a few days.

Fear can also keep us from right relationships. Remember the story of Jacob the night before he was to meet his brother, Esau. He was afraid to meet Esau because he had cheated Esau out of his birthright.

Jacob wrestled with God. It was during that wrestling match that God reminded him that even in the face of fear, we are to turn our heart toward God.

Such turning not only transforms us but it alters the way we see the other. The next day when he sees his brother he remarks that seeing Esau is like “seeing the face of God.” (Gen 33: 10b)

If we let fear take over it can paralyze us. It can keep us from doing the most loving thing. But when we invite God in to the process. Love takes over and love always wins