

Lord, Are You Asleep?

I can remember approaching the Sea of Galilee in our bus and wondering if we were going to have to go on a boat ride. You see, I don't care too much for boats and water and especially wind over water creating choppy waves. Or shall I say my stomach doesn't care for it?

So, I guess I might have uttered a little prayer, "Please dear God, don't make us go on this boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Look at the waves. I'm going to get sick!"

As we got off the buses and approached the dock, it soon became evident that we weren't going out on the lake that day. My prayer was answered! The wind was too strong, making boating on the lake a dangerous ride. Whew! Saved by the wind! Back to the bus!

But on the way back to the bus a more dangerous situation occurred. One of our group fell through a hole in the boardwalk up to his shoulders; his underarms caught him and kept him from falling through into the lake. That was even more scary than the anticipated boat ride. Howard was hurt but not too badly that he couldn't continue along on the trip.

Some of us are scared of even little things, while much larger waves might be waiting out in the ocean's deeper water. Our fears may even consume us, preventing us from enjoying life, having a good time, and feeling free to do many things. Something bad *might* happen. *What if* such and such happens? We paralyze ourselves with unfounded fears or allow fear to control us.

Two explorers were on a jungle safari when suddenly a ferocious lion jumped in front of them. "Keep calm" the first explorer whispered. "Remember what we read in that book on wild animals? If you stand perfectly still and look the lion in the eye, he will turn and run." "Sure," replied his companion. "You've read the book, and I've read the book. But has the lion read the book?"

I've told you this one before, but it's fun and I'll tell it again. One summer night during a thunderstorm a mother was tucking her little boy into bed. She was about to turn the light off when the boy asked in a trembling voice, "Mommy, will you stay with me all night?" Smiling, the mother gave him a warm, reassuring hug and said tenderly, "I can't dear. I have to sleep in Daddy's room." A long silence followed. At last it was broken by a shaky voice saying, "The big sissy!"

Aren't we all sissies about some things? I remember Alma Walker wanted to loan me her car to pick up a new office chair in Manayunk. I didn't want to do it for fear something might happen to her new station wagon. Alma's response to my fear? "Where's your faith, pastor?"

Where is our faith indeed, Jesus asks. "Have you still no faith?" Jesus says with exasperation to the 12. You have seen all these things and had all these experiences with me and you still don't believe. You still can't trust me. You still doubt that I care enough about you to save you.

Well, the fact is "Jesus not only calmed the storm, but he overcame death itself. Even the grave could not keep him down" (www.sundaysandseason.com). Who is this, that even wind and water obey him? Who has the power to calm a storm, to bring peace to an apprehensive heart? Only One that I know of. "Oh who can make a flower – oh, who can give us peace – no one but God, it's true."

Some people live an anxious life, for reasons not apparent on the surface. They worry about not worrying enough! Their palms get sweaty, heart races, stomach churns – someone like this might be described as a "raw nerve." Where did this anxiety come from and where does it get you? "Oh, who can give us peace?" How do we handle these anxieties? Is Jesus asleep in the stern?

Beth Howard can teach us how to calm ourselves through meditation or yoga. She is holding a class at summer's end. That could help. The hard part might be recognizing when we're in one of these "racing moments." Pausing and taking slow deep breaths might help. Re-visualizing can also help – see Jesus' face in your mind's eye and feel his compassion and desire for healing you of the anxiety. Get away from the noise where you are, and go to a safe place in your mind, your favorite place, a peaceful place, and stay there for a while. Go for a bike ride. Trust in the Lord – "where's your faith, pastor?"

There are indeed real and threatening fears. Who would imagine that a guest at a Bible study would open fire on those who sat together in prayer? Who would imagine that the accused would fear black people or hate them so much that he felt he wanted to kill them? The Bishop of our Church, Elizabeth Eaton, has said that both the accused and two of the victims have Lutheran connections: the accused a member of an ELCA congregation, and two of the dead pastors graduating from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. "One of our own," Bishop Eaton said, "is alleged to have shot and killed two who adopted us as their own."

Friends, racism is alive and thriving, and Christians need to do something about it. No more racial humor. No more putting others down. No more turning a blind eye toward racial or other prejudice. Jesus is not asleep in the stern on this one but standing guard and taking notes. It is intolerable to think that 21st century Christians who live in an enlightened society should put anyone down for any reason. Be in prayer with those who have lost loved ones in Charleston. Don't hate or put down anyone.

Some of us have been afflicted with pain and suffering for a very long time. We ask, "How long, O Lord, must I suffer like this?" Is Jesus asleep in the stern? Hardly. Then why not heal the pain? In faith, I do not know. But in faith I do know that God is there within our suffering. The One whom wind and waves obey is present when fear and misery have their way with us. How I wish I could resolve that suffering for you. But I *can* sit with you in the midst of it and pray for your welfare. I can help you cope with your suffering and fear. I can pray for strength for you to carry on in the midst of it, just as Jesus did the last week of his earthly life.

Jesus is not asleep in the stern. He is present with us in the open, choppy waters of our fears. He hears us when we cry to him. Amen

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