

God is Love-Always

[1 Kings 19:9-18](#)

[Psalm 85:8-13](#)

[Romans 10:5-15](#)

[Matthew 14:22-33](#)

It was a quiet evening after the feeding of the five thousand plus. Jesus had gone up a mountain to pray and the disciples headed home across the lake. Perhaps Jesus told them pick him up later, or perhaps he planned to walk back in his own time. It was a quiet evening hundreds of years earlier when Elijah huddled in his cave, having had a great triumph over the priests of the pagan god Baal but now afraid for his life. These are quiet evenings in Los Osos as we wait for the pandemic to pass so that we can again freely and easily go out to dinner, meet friends or enjoy a concert.

The gospel account of Jesus taking a short-cut across the lake is I think a wonderful analogy for how things are for us right now. We are out on the waters of the coronavirus with all that it brings in its wake - illness, chaos, financial disaster – and amid the strong winds of deep social unrest, and greater divisiveness. These are not easy times. It can seem pretty dark and bleak. And as the disciples strain against the wind, to their utter amazement and fear they see Jesus walking towards them across the water. They're not sure it's him until he says, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Then Peter says "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And Jesus says, "Come." Peter leaps out of the boat and begins to walk, yes he is really walking and for a few minutes all is well, but then he remembers where he is, he sees the wind and the waves and he begins to sink. So Jesus takes him by the hand and pulls him out saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I have often heard this as punitive – you stupid person why did you doubt? But this year I'm hearing it as loving. It's like a child learning to ride a bicycle and they're doing really well but then the big wobble comes, the wobble that they can't quite control, and instead of keeping pedaling and using the momentum to get the balance back, they fall over. And the loving parent catches them, saying "You were doing really well, why did you stop?" "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I find myself a bit like Peter. I am doing ok. I think I have my rhythm sorted and I'm managing pretty well to get things done and to stay hopeful and relaxed in Christ but then there's a new piece of news, or something I already knew hits home in a new way, and I wobble. I falter. I begin to sink. Yesterday my friend said, "If I let myself think about the future I would be distraught." One difference between her and me is that I know Jesus is standing there and he's not wobbling. And I know that when my wobble threatens to turn me over, Jesus is right there, Jesus is saying, "Take heart, it is I: do not be afraid." And I know that when I start to sink, Jesus is reaching out his hand saying, "You of little faith, why do you doubt?"

But I don't actually see him or hear him. I talked about this at last night's eucharist and then I lay in bed wondering whether what I just said is true for me. Do I really believe that when I am having a big wobble, Jesus is right there? And the answer is yes, I believe it but I don't always remember it. In fact, the wobble might not happen if I always remembered it. It's like Peter – he was doing ok walking across the lake, defying the laws of nature, until he looked away from Jesus and noticed where he was – out on a lake in a heavy wind.

Let's take a quick look at the great prophet Elijah in his cave. He has basically run away. He's scared. He challenged the pagan prophets of Baal to call down fire on an altar and they couldn't do it, but he called on God and the fire came. This showed how powerful the true God is, but Elijah somehow lost sight of that and thought that God couldn't or wouldn't protect him, so he ran.

And God came to him and spoke to him in the cave of his despair. And then Yahweh passed by – not in the great wind, not in the earthquake, but in the sheer silence after the storm.

It seems that it is after the storm has passed, after I have been lifted up out of the water, after I realize that Jesus isn't wobbling that I remember to have faith. I can look back and say, "Friday was a really bad day, but today is ok. God must have been with me."

The trick for me is to learn how to have faith in the moment. The trick is to look at Jesus not at the waves. The trick is to take time in prayer before the winds come or before you find yourself huddling in a cave afraid for your life.

Paul has something to say about this in his letter to the Romans. He says, "The word (of faith) is near you, on your lips and in your heart." Faith is not something distant, something to be searched for in distant places. Faith is right here, right here in our hearts and on our lips.

Now I'm not talking about the kind of faith where you have to believe three impossible things before breakfast. I'm talking about the kind of faith that helps you know that however bad things get, God is here, God loves us and will not let us down. We are all mortal. We get sick. People die. Empires crumble. If you read the Bible you know that a lot of bad stuff happens. But God's love is steadfast. God's love never changes.

That's the kind of faith we need to nurture in ourselves and others.

Recently in the quiet evenings, I've watched a few episodes of the series Greenleaf which takes place behind the scenes in a southern megachurch. Just as we might say, "The Lord be with you" and "also with you" They say, "God is good" and the response is "Always." I like that. How would it be if we greet one another with "God is love - Always."

How would it be if you greeted yourself every morning with "God is Love – always."

"The word (of faith) is near you, on your lips and in your heart." Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." Peter's request was the word of faith on his lips. In that moment, Peter trusted that God is love-always.

The faith of our hearts is increased by the words of our lips. I encourage you to find a prayer, a hymn, a mantra and to say it or sing it every day and even more so when you look up and notice that you're out on a lake and the wind is blowing might strong and mighty cold.

And that prayer, hymn or mantra, that word of faith on your lips, can help you remember in the moment, that Jesus Is not wobbling and to hear his words, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." For our God is love – Always.