

Ordinary 19A - 2020

An avid duck hunter was in the market for a new bird dog. His search ended when he found a dog that could actually walk on water to retrieve a duck. Shocked by his find, he was sure none of his friends would ever believe him. He decided to try to break the news to a friend of his, a pessimist by nature, and invited him to hunt with him and his new dog. As they waited by the shore, a flock of ducks flew by. they fired, and a duck fell. The dog responded and jumped into the water. The dog, however, did not sink but instead walked across the water to retrieve the bird, never getting more than his paws wet. The friend saw everything but did not say a single word. On the drive home the hunter asked his friend, "Did you notice anything unusual about my new dog?" "I sure did," responded his friend. "He can't swim."

A woman is walking down the street when she hears a voice shout, "Stop!" And she stops, and a piece of metal falls from space just in front of her--perhaps debris from a satellite. If she had gone one step farther, she would have been killed. She looks around to find the person who saved her life and sees no one. A few days later she is about to cross a street and she hears the same voice boom, "Stop!" And a car, out of control, zooms by in front of her--missing her by inches. She looks around again for the source of the strange but life-saving voice. She sees no one, but this time she hears a voice. "Do you know who I am?" the voice asks. "No, I don't," she answers. "I am your guardian angel," says the voice. "I am here to protect you from harm." Instead of voicing her gratitude, the woman was indignant. "There's just one thing I want to know," she said, "Where were you when I got married?"

All of us take risks. We would never have anything if we did not. No new relationships would be formed. No new businesses would be started. No new homes would be built. Helen Keller got it right when she said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky put it this way, "You miss 100% of the shots you never take." Mark Twain waxed poetic when he wrote: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Today's Gospel describes how Peter takes a risk by stepping into the sea to walk upon water.

Geography plays an important part in understanding our Gospel. Pilgrims to Israel are reminded that being in the places where Jesus lived is considered the 5th Gospel.

The Sea of Galilee - first time surprised - 13 miles long, 8 miles wide - pretty much see all the shoreline from most anywhere on the lake. It is the second lowest lake in the world and the lowest freshwater lake - 690' below sea level. The lowest of course is the Dead Sea - 1400' below sea level and 1000' deep - bottom then is 2400' below sea level. The Jordan river runs in to the sea from the north and then exits to the south where it end up in the dead sea. There only other significant experience with water is the Mediterranean Sea. For the centuries before Jesus - great terror Jews did not explore the world in boats. Have you ever heard of the Jewish Navy? By and large they were afraid of water and most could not swim.

Only God can walk on the waves. That is what the Bible says. In Job, in Isaiah, in Habakkuk, in the Psalms, it is God who walks on the storm, God who makes a path in the sea. Why? To show a miracle? To say, 'Hey, look, I'm walking on water.' No, don't be shallow.

In ancient times the sea was the place of evil. The evil monster was there; the Leviathan was there. The enemy of all that we know as good and right is there in the water. In the Bible, the water is the abode of all the forces that are against us. And God walks on the sea. In other words, there is no power, no storm, no wind, no force in the world that God cannot conquer, no evil over which God is not superior, nothing that can destroy your life because God loves and cares for you.

"Jesus' walking on the water is not to be understood as a miracle. Look at it, listen to it. Jesus comes in the storm on the sea and says, 'Take heart, I am?' These words are translated, 'It is I' or 'I am he?' but what Jesus actually says is, 'I am.' 'I am'-- that's the name for God. God has come to them in the storm in the person of Jesus, and what happens? They cannot believe it. At first they say, 'It's a ghost, it's a ghost!' From a distance

Jesus does indeed seem like a ghost. I know a lot of people who have never made friends with Jesus, and he is still out there as a ghost-like thing. "But Jesus gets closer, and Simon Peter says to him, 'If you are . . . if you are, tell me to come to you on the water.' Do you recognize those words? Do you remember hearing those words before? When Jesus was tested in the wilderness, the devil said, 'If you are the son of God . . .' The words of Simon Peter are the words of the tempter. I am putting you to the test, Jesus. If you are really the son of God...

As Barbara Brown Taylor said in a sermon, if there is a miracle worth savoring in this story, then it's maybe not that Jesus could walk on water (after all, if Jesus is God, then his ability to walk on water is no more surprising than your or my ability to walk up a flight of steps.) And the miracle is not that Peter managed that same trick for a moment or two. No, the miracle is that when it was all said and done-while a soggy and chagrined Peter sputtered seawater out of his lungs and as the boat continued to bob around in the dead of that rather dark night-somehow in the midst of those humble surroundings way out there in the middle of nowhere, the disciples realized that no one less than God's own Son was sitting right in front of them. So they worshiped him. They believed.