

“Crossing Over”
Sermon on Sunday, June 27, 2021

Dear church,

Sometimes stories grab you in ways that defy time and space: a tiny detail from a past world becomes a metaphor for a contemporary situation. In today’s gospel Jesus crosses over by boat to the other side of Lake Galilee, the large body of water in his home region. He is coming back from a successful trip to the predominantly Gentile eastern shore, returning to his home region on the Western side, which was majority Jewish. The fault lines in the ancient world were often drawn along cultural, religious and political differences. Sounds familiar, right?

The lake crossings of Jesus, his desire to crisscross the ideological divide of his time – it is a powerful metaphor for what it might mean to be a peacemaker and a Christian in the true sense of the word. Rarely does peace happen without movement, without people looking at the same scenery, the same evidence from different sides. That’s what our Lord does in the gospels several times. He changes perspective. He meets people on the other side. He speaks to them. And, according to the gospels, healings occur frequently on either side of the shore. A mere coincidence? I think it is more. Let us pay attention to it!

Fast forward to the United States of America, which will celebrate its Independence Day a week from now, Independence Day number 245. If Christ were to visit our country today, where would he go? Would he not be compelled to visit people on both sides of the shore, so to speak? Would he not find out what rural America is really like or perhaps pay a visit to the local Mosque to see how Muslims have dealt with the pandemic? Would he not break bread with Christians and Jews alike? And cross over the boundaries, both real and artificial that we keep between ourselves? Would he not try to overcome the distrust between brothers and sisters of the same human family and even the same nationality? Maybe Jesus’ boat would be a small airplane, I don’t know, but one thing I do know: he would reach out to the other side! Let us pay attention.

And then, and to me this is not coincidence but very much part of Holy Scripture and its hidden wisdom, he is in a position to heal; he brings blessings back to his own people. Whether it’s the leader of a local congregation who urges him to save his daughter or a woman with an embarrassing problem who can’t even articulate her predicament but instead touches his cloak in the hopes that healing will emanate from this man of God – the thing is: healing takes place almost immediately upon his return from the other side. It’s as if there was something he had picked up among the people on the opposite shore. When the unnamed sufferer touches Jesus, he physically feels power leaving his body, he can’t even help it. It’s happening to him. And she is healed. A twelve-year old girl is brought back to life after people had already given up on her. It all happened right after his return from the other side. Let us pay attention to that.

Do I make too much of Jesus' previous trip across the lake when most of the gospel reading for this Sunday is clearly about a spectacular story of healing, a double healing, a funeral stopper, a tear jerker? Perhaps I make too much of it, but that's what I hear the spirit say to us today. And more than that, the spirit of God goes further, at least as I hear the text with my ears wide open. Is not our current climate of culture wars and finger pointing like a national bleeding that needs to be stopped? Like the unnamed woman in this story we have been to all kinds of doctors; but none of the prescriptions have worked. Would it be such a bad idea to touch the person who has been in frequent conversation with people on both sides of the shore? Maybe we just can't help ourselves, no matter how hard we try! Maybe we need help to stop the bleeding from the soul of America, from among Americans who are mostly well-meaning.

And so this story leads me to the heart of the gospel, which is: to stay in touch with Christ as our healer and yes, savior, our peacemaker and unifier, the one who loves to bring different tribes together and remind them that they are children of the same heavenly father; the one who stops the bleeding. The one who constantly crosses over to the other side because in God's kingdom there are no sides really, just different angles. That may sound simple and simplistic in a world in which we have learned to accept the unacceptable and to live with constant division, allowing it to seep even into our communities of faith. But simple it is not. It takes courage and love to meet people on the other side. It takes self-discipline to abstain from judgment. It takes faith to believe in a vision of life that is bigger than what seems possible at the time. As a pastor I would say this: the healing of our nation is a matter of faith. And the communities of faith should be the first ones in the boat to cross over and receive and share healing.

Amen.