

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

I Kgs 19:9a, 11-13a

Ps 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14

Rom 9:1-5

Mt 14:22-33

Why doesn't Jesus stop the storm?

The boat with his disciples is battered by the winds and threatened by waves. Many of the men in the boat are fishermen: they have seen the bodies of men drowned in just such storms. There is not Coast Guard to come to their rescue, no radio to call for help, no flares to signal their distress. These men are not wearing life jackets. If the ship is swamped, if the boat goes down, they will die.

Why doesn't Jesus stop the storm?

The Lord comes to his followers, walking through the dreadful swells, unswayed by the tumult, undeterred by the thunderous chaos. The lake is furious, the waves slam the boat, the disciples are white with fear. In the midst of all this, Jesus calls to Peter: "Come to me now, walk out into the storm and come to me."

Why doesn't Jesus stop the storm?

Why not first calm the waves and calm the hearts of his followers, and then call to Peter? Why not stop the storm first, then say to Peter, 'Come'? It would hardly be any less of a test of Peter's faith. Have you ever stepped from the safety of a boat onto the dark surface of a deep sea in the blackest part of the night?

And when Peter's faith falters, Jesus *still* does not calm the waves. He reaches out his hand to Peter, lifts him up in the midst of the storm, and brings him to safety. "After they got into the boat, the wind died down." Only after Peter is in the boat does Jesus calm the waves.

Why doesn't Jesus stop the storm first? The order of things seems all wrong. Wouldn't it be better to first calm the sea, then reassure his disciples, and then ask Peter to show his faith? Why doesn't Jesus sweep away the danger, push aside the fear, turn away the threat and pain and uncertainty?

I don't know. Jesus doesn't tell us why there is evil in the world. Jesus never explains why teenagers die of cancer, why some men choose to crash planes into office buildings, why an earthquake spares one town but destroys another. If you read the Gospels straight through, from the first line of Mark to the last line of John, you will never come across these words on the lips of the Lord: "The reason bad things happen to good people is because..." He does not tell us why there are storms. He does not tell us why he doesn't stop the storms.

What Jesus does tell us is that he is present in the storms of our lives. Christ is not absent in tragedy, Christ is not absent in grief, Christ is not absent in loneliness. The bills do not pile up, our bodies do not grow weak and sick, our hearts are not broken, our children do not make terrible mistakes, because Christ has deserted us. Christ stands by us in those storms, he calls to us in the winds, he reaches out to us in our misery, sorrow, and shame, "Trust me! Come to me now, walk out into the storm and come to me." He may not stop the storm, but he never leaves

our side.

What do we search for in this life? A flawless husband or wife? Perhaps, when we are young - but the wise man or woman does not chase that fantasy. What do we search for in this life? Success upon success and endless applause? Perhaps, when we are young - but the man and woman of experience know these are but shadows. What do we search for in this life? Perfect health, beauty without blemish, the pleasure of ceaseless novelty? Perhaps, when we are young; and perhaps even as we grow old, when we spend our time at the gym and our wealth on cosmetics, and accept the pain of the surgeon's blade and sacrifice our virtue in the quest for bygone thrills. At different times we search for all sorts of silly things, but we come to know we cannot have them. This day, Christ says to us: You can have me, always, without fail. Search for me, and you will find me. Raise your ears above the storm and my voice can be heard. You cannot have perfection, but you can have my faithfulness. You cannot live without pain, but you can have my loyalty. You cannot in this world be always happy, but you can always have me, by your side, a rock in the midst of storms and sickness, a beacon through the shrouds of rain and tears. This day Christ says, "Come. Come to me now. Do not wait for the calm sea and the cloudless day. My salvation is near to you now. See it on this altar, taste it on your lips, hear it in my word. You are not alone."

Why doesn't Jesus stop the storms? I don't know. But this day he says, "I am always there. The storm may rage, but you will not drown. Your faith may weaken, but my hand will bear you up." And this day Christ reminds us that one of the greatest gifts we can give to each other is loyalty. The commitment of family, the faithfulness of spouses, the loyalty of friends: these we search for and these we can find. All of us are never more like Christ than when the storms blow and the waves crash, and we remain a rock beside a husband or wife, a son or daughter, a brother or sister, a neighbor or colleague, a friend, a fellow child of God in need.