

The Second Sunday before Lent, Year C, 2022

Genesis 2.4b-9, 15-25; Luke 8.22-25, Psalm 65, Proper 4

One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

In the name of the Father...

Where is your faith? Wo ist euer Glaube? Ubi est fides vestra? Where is your faith? This is not a question about whether or not the disciples have faith, but where their faith is located. It is a question as relevant today as it was then in a boat on the lake. Where is the locus of our faith meaning the place of faith in our lives at any given moment. Is ours a fair-weather faith or, to stay with the Gospel narrative, one that will remain steadfast in the storms of life? Will we stay the course?

Where is your faith? This question about location is not an easy one to answer, nevertheless it challenges each of us to seek and give an answer. We aren't provided with any guidance in today's gospel reading it seems. There we move on straightaway to overhearing the disciples asking a different question to Jesus' question. A question that does not follow on from Jesus' question, but rather comes out of their experience of Jesus rebuking the wind and the raging waves. Their question is a question about Jesus' identity linked to his authority. They ask, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" Did they have a verse from Psalm 65 in mind? 'O God of our salvation... You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.' (vs. 5, 7) Note that they don't seem to be answering the question Jesus asks them. After this side-stepping, the story of Jesus' deeds continues with the healing of a man possessed by a legion of unclean spirits on the other side of the lake, known as the Gerasene demoniac.

The side-stepping of questions is something we do all the time. Sometimes to gain time or to cover up. People have said of me that I will answer a question with a question. Why? Hopefully to better understand what is being asked, as the questions asked often touch on matters to do with the eternal, the transcendent, the meaning of life, our very existence... We hold this treasure in earthen vessels. On at least one occasion Jesus asks the disciples, "But who do you say I am?" He is not interested in what other people are saying about him, but rather he drills down and wants to know from the disciples who they think he is? Not unlike today's Gospel when he asks, 'Where is your faith?' He doesn't ask in a general sense, but in a personal sense. He is drilling down.

Jesus' 'Where is your faith?' is a question the disciples may never have asked themselves or were ever asked until Jesus poses it. I think many of us would be hard pressed to give a straight answer. We might like to gain time saying I'll get back to you on that one... Or I need to sleep on that one... Often intending to give an answer, but then leaving it there until the next time. The games people play are the games we play with ourselves.

We might think, well you have faith or you don't. A question about where faith is located seems foreign to us. Are we entering new territory when Jesus' asks 'Where is your faith?' We like the disciples are crossing over to other side of the lake. In their case to the country of the Gerasenes in Transjordan.

As Christians we too are passing over. We are on the water. What lives in the deeps of the lake? What sea monsters or beasts reside there? What dangers does the lake harbour? Is the sea a metaphor for our innermost selves? The uproar inside of us? The darkness that has taken up its home in us? The confusion that paralyses us? How well do we know ourselves? How well do we want to know ourselves? Where is our faith?

Is our faith getting away from us? Do we need to snatch it out of the air and put it back in its place? Do we like a butterfly catcher need to get out our nets and catch the faith that isn't rooted in us, that hasn't taken up its home in us? Is our faith to be likened to a butterfly swirling around us? Where is your faith? Is it out there or is it in here, part of who we are with every fibre of our body.

The Jewish faith would assign different attributes to different parts of the body, similarly to how we assign love in general and romantic love in particular to the heart today. Where is your faith? Gut, heart, kidneys, liver, head? When Jesus asks, 'Where is your faith?' was he thinking about an organ of the body? Well we don't know, but probably not.

'Where is your faith?' is an awkward question methinks. Is it a thing? One of my Bibles (die Basisbibel) notes ever so briefly on the subject of faith, "What is meant here is deep trust in God." Where is your trust? I think immediately of Psalm 20.7 (AV), "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." A ready answer was available to the disciples it seems through such a verse? They could have answered that their trust was in the name of the LORD our God, who made heaven and earth. It is no coincidence that the Old Testament reading assigned is the second creation story in the book of Genesis, which quietly celebrates work, when we read, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Similarly, it is not good that we humans are now so often without God alone in a vast universe having exchanged the glory of the immortal God for pride, self-conceit, and hypocrisy with war looming, democracies being hollowed out from within, the rich getting richer, ...

Given the change of geographical location in this gospel it would be nice to think that what is happening can best be described by the word dislocation. The disciples can't answer because their world is being turned upside down. Their faith in the name of the LORD is being challenged by a person of whom Luke writes, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour." (Luke 2:52) A shift is occurring. But in this moment they are unable to answer. They have been sidetracked. This is a crisis moment. This is a transitional moment. Or does it at least have the potential of being a transitional moment? Faith in a name will be enriched and given nuance by the faith in a person. The one who in the disciples' question can command even the winds and the raging waters, and they obey him.

Last week we heard how Jesus came down from the mountain to the plain to be amongst the crowds and with disciples as he teaches. Today he is with the disciples in the boat. And I want to give the disciples credit. One important aspect of the Christian life is knowing where to turn. In their distress they turn to Jesus, calling out Master, Master (1). During the week I had reason to consider Psalm 91. In this Psalm we are reminded that God is a sure refuge and that God will cover us with his pinions, and under his wings we will find refuge. His faithfulness is a shield and buckler and other such assuring words and pictures ending with "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them."

Jesus's question, 'Where is your faith?' was one the disciples were unable to answer at the time of asking, because as suggested above it means bringing the person of Jesus into their lives, into their faith and into the story of their faith reading back in time to 'the day the Lord God made the earth and the heavens'. And in a roundabout way, too subtle perhaps for them to realise, a step is made on the way to giving an answer, Who is this? Soon, very soon they who put their trust in the Name of the Lord, they who have faith in the name of the Lord will also come to have faith in a person, the person of Jesus Christ. And it is this Jesus Christ who will take them out into the world. 'Where is your faith?' By now it should be ringing in your ears. It is a question that can be our companion as we embark on our keeping of Lent that takes us to the foot of the cross and beyond.

End

1. Epistata, Master Definition:

pr. one who stands by; one who is set over; in NT in voc., equivalent to διδάσκαλε, or ραββι, master, doctor, Lk. 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13*