

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (August 7, 2011)

Most of us, when entering this church, sit in the same spot we always sit it; we take the same route to work; we spend time with the same people; we order only those entrees with which we are familiar; we read only the news that agrees with our viewpoint; the list goes on. We all have our "comfort zones," ways of behaving and living that are the tried and true...the comfortable. Elijah and Peter were called out of their comfort zones, so that they could expand their understanding of God.

Elijah is running away from the wrath of Jezebel and he enters a cave, waiting to hear a message from God; this divine message doesn't occur in the manner he thought: not through powerful winds, nor an earthquake, nor the fire, but in a tiny whispering sound. This encounter of the Living God transformed Elijah's manner of experiencing God, enlarging his comfort zone. How might God be speaking to you in a way that might surprise, or even, disturb you?

Jesus clearly wanted to be separate from the disciples: he sent them to the other side of the lake on a boat while he prayed on the mountain. Jesus wanted them to be tossed about by a very angry sea which is exactly what happened. And Jesus responded by coming out of his prayer and onto those disturbing waters where he appeared to the frantic disciples walking on water. Peter, representing the church, wasn't really sure and so he asked Jesus to command him to come out of the boat. Jesus did and Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water, yes Peter actually began to walk on the water because his eyes were focused on the eyes of Christ and in this encounter, Jesus shared his power with Peter. Our Jesus, our Lord, is not a selfish God but one who wants us to participate in the transformation of our lives and the world.

Everything was fine for Peter until he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the powerful wind and turbulent waters. It is no different for us. Jesus calls us out of our own boat or comfort zone to walk on the turbulent waters of life, waters of self doubt, fear and loneliness. And we can walk safely above these waters if we keep our eyes on Christ's loving gaze.

We can only grow spiritually when we leave our comfort zones and place out total trust in God and his love for us. The spirituality of our childhoods can never sustain us in our adult lives: we need to grow and expand our understanding of God and our relationship with him, like Elijah and Peter.

This community of faith can only grow when we move out of our comfort zones and plan for our future. The new facility plan, a ten-year vision of where we want to go, will ask each of us to leave our comfort zone as to how we see this parish. No one likes change, which is sort of ironic, since the gospel and discipleship is all about change and transformation. And this change can be ignited by a "small whispering sound" – think of Rosa Parks who just wouldn't leave her seat in the front of the bus; or Gandhi, who refused to give up a first class compartment on a train. These tiny little actions caused mountains to be moved. But they certainly didn't make Rosa or Gandhi comfortable. We must always keep in mind: when we leave the boat of our comfort zone, even if we start sinking, Jesus will always pull us up into safety.