

Walking on Water

Not so long ago, a priest was talking about how hard it is to take the Bible seriously in these modern times.

Imagine, he said, if after the service, we broke up into groups and went out two by two into the neighborhood, knocking on doors and offering to heal the sick and raise the dead.

Why, they'd either look at us funny, slam the door or call the cops!

I'm wondering what my brother priest will say today when Jesus isn't just asking us to do some healing — but to walk on water!

And I couldn't help thinking, isn't it precisely the things that at first blush seem to be impossible that our faith calls us to try?

And if we run away from that call, then who are we?

Just look at where we are.

These last 300 years or so have seen a tremendous loss in what it means to be human.

In our pursuit of knowledge and science and prosperity, we've spent these many years rejecting our innate connection with the mysterious, the sacred, the ineffable.

We've exchanged dreams and mystery and wonder for the cheap substitutes of certainty and control.

Which has led to a world devoid of depth.

Which leads directly to addictions and isolation and despair, because we aren't created to live in the shallows — we're created for the deep!

Today's gospel lesson is a marvelous invitation to reclaim the depths of who we are.

To let go of our restricted notions of what is "real" — to discover that we are all destined to walk on water in the truest sense of those words.

Think of those who have come before us, those who learned to walk on water!

Think of Mahatma Gandhi who walked on water when he confronted the power of the British Empire with active, persistent, stubborn non-violence.

Think of Martin Luther King, Jr, who, with millions at his side, walked on water as they all came to see that "at the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love.

The nonviolent resister comes to know that in the struggle for human dignity, the oppressed of the world cannot succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter or indulging in hate.

To retaliate in kind does nothing but intensify hate in the universe.

Instead, we must have sense enough and morality enough to cut the chain of hate.

This only happens when the ethic of love lives within the very center of our lives." Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 103-104, modified.

We walk on water when we challenge the so-called logic that might makes right, that weapons of mass destruction are necessary, that the few have the right to rule over the many.

Those who carry on the struggle in the name of Black Lives Matter walk on water as they shine a searing light on centuries of having black

necks crushed beneath white boots — a reality too many of we white folks choose to ignore, to look away from, to deny.

And so through peaceful, persistent protest comes the cry that the status quo of racial and economic injustice cannot stand.

That's what walking on water is all about!

This week marks the anniversaries of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

August 6.

August 9.

Today, a group of non-violent prayerful protesters await their sentence by a federal judge for having the audacity to break into a nuclear weapons facility to pour blood on these satanic weapons.

How'd they get there?

They walked on water!

We walk on water when we come to embrace the truth that "love is not some kind of sentimentally weak response to the evils of poverty, racism and war in this world.

Love is that force which all of the great religions see as the supreme unifying principle of life.

Love is the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.

This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully stated in the first epistle of Saint John:

'Let us love one another; for love comes from God and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God.'" [1 John 4:7]." MLK, Jr., modified.

Today's gospel calls us to reclaim what it is to be fully human.

Because to be fully human is to be inextricably bound up, part of, immersed in, the divine!

And because of our true nature and our ultimate destiny, we are all of us called to walk on water.

Our faith is a call to get out of the boat, especially in the midst of uncertainty, and trust the firm arm of God to hold us tight even when chaos surrounds us.

There's a wonderful African American folktale that reminds us of who we are and what it means to be truly human.

Just as Christ invites us to walk on the seas, this story invites us to fly!

It's called "The People Could Fly":

"They say the people could fly.

That long ago in Africa, some of the people can walk up on the air like climbin' up on a gate.

And they fly like blackbirds over the fields, flappin' against the blue up there.

Until, many of the people are captured for Slavery.

The ones that can fly shed their wings.

They can't take their wings across the water on slave ships.

Too crowded.

The folks are full of misery, sick with the up and down of the sea.

The people who can fly keep their power, although they shed their wings.

They look the same as the other people from Africa who are coming over, so you can't tell anymore one who can fly from one who can't.

One who can is old man Toby, and a young woman who once had wings, Sarah, who carries a babe tied to her back.

The slaves labor in the fields from sunup to sundown.

The owner of the slaves cracks his whip over the slow ones to make them move faster.

Sarah hoes and chops as the babe on her back grows hungry, starts bawling, but Sarah can't stop to feed it, to soothe it.

"Keep that thing quiet," calls the Overseer.

The woman scrunches low, but he cracks his whip across the babe anyhow, who hollers like any hurt child, as the woman falls to the earth.

The old man that's there, Toby, comes and helps her to her feet.

"I must go soon," she tells him.

"Yes, daughter, the time is come," Toby answers.

Go, as you know how to go!"

So the young woman lifts one foot on the air.

Then the other.

She flies clumsily at first, with the child now tucked tightly within her arms.

She feels the African mystery.

She rises, just as free as a bird.

As light as a feather.

The slaves who can't fly tell about the people who can fly to their children.

When they finally get free.

When they can sit close to the fire in the free land, they tell it.

The children of the ones who can't fly tell it to their children.

And now, I am telling it to you."

Why have we lost our ability to walk on water?

Why have we lost our ability to fly?

Perhaps "we seem to lack faith in our time because we aren't doing the things that require faith." Rev Ernest Campbell, modified.

As the chaos of civil unrest, economic collapse and pandemic encircle us, maybe the blessing of all of this craziness is that we have little choice but to leave the safety of our boats.

For those of us who have enjoyed so much race-based and gender-based privilege, can we stop talking for awhile, and simply listen?

For those who have been oppressed for so long, can you come to believe that you can walk on water?

Can you come to believe that you can fly?

+amen