

Crossing Over

Sermon 21 June 2009 (Father's Day)

Scripture *Mark 4:35-41*

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Pray with me: May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of all our hearts, be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer.

Christmas Eve, eight year old Kevin walks around his neighbourhood late in the afternoon. Kevin passes a church. Hearing music and curious, he enters. Following the sound, he finds his way to the sanctuary. At the front, the choir director rehearses the children's choir for the evening services. Little Kevin slips into a pew to listen. As he sits, he becomes conscious of someone standing at the end of his pew. Kevin looks up. He is startled to see his neighbour, Mr. Marley. Mr. Marley lives alone. Kevin never sees anyone at the Marley home, no family no visitors. To Kevin and his friends, Mr. Marley seems haunting if not haunted. In fact, they refer to him as "old man Marley."

Let's listen to the conversation that transpires between Kevin and Mr. Marley that Christmas Eve at church.

Marley: Merry Christmas. You live next door to me, don't you?

Kevin: [looking frightened, but nodding] Yes...

Marley: You can say 'hello' to me when you see me, you don't need to be afraid. There are a lot of things being said about me, but none of it is true.

Kevin: [nodding again and reluctantly] Okay...

Marley: [sitting down next to Kevin] Been a good boy this year?

Kevin: [sounding hesitant] I... think... so...

Marley: Swear to it?

Kevin: [slowly, sounding sad] Noooo.

Marley: I had a feeling. This is the place to be if you are feeling bad about yourself.

Kevin: [looking around] It is? Are you feeling bad about yourself?

Marley: No!

Kevin: Well..., I have been kind of a pain lately. I said some things to my family that I should not have said. I am kind of upset about it. I really like my family even though I sometimes say that I do not like them. Sometimes I even think I do not like them. Do you know what I mean?

Marley: Mmmm... How you feel about your family is a complicated thing. Deep down, you always love them. But you can forget that you love them. You can hurt them and they can hurt you... [Pause] You want to know the real reason I am here, right now?

Kevin: Sure.

Marley: I came to hear my granddaughter, [point] up there with the choir. That little red-haired girl is my granddaughter. I came to hear her sing. I cannot come tonight.

Kevin: You have other plans?

Marley: No. I am not welcome.

Kevin: [shocked] You are not welcome at church?!

Marley: [chuckling] You are always welcome at church. But, I am not welcome by my son. Years back.... I had an argument with him.

Kevin: How old is he?

Marley: [sounding wistful] Oh, he's grown up. We lost our tempers. I said I did not care to see him any more. He said the same. We have not seen, or spoken a word to each other since.

Kevin: You sound as though you miss him.

Marley: I do.

Kevin: Well, if you miss him, why don't you call him?

Marley: I am afraid, afraid if I call him, he won't talk to me.

Kevin: How do you know?

Marley: I don't know. I'm just afraid he won't.

Kevin: No offense, but aren't you a little too old to be afraid?

Marley: You can be "a little too old" for a lot of things, but you are never too old to be afraid. Players return to their seats...

I'll come back to Kevin and Marley, but now let's take a look at our scripture reading. Jewish folk flock to hear Jesus. Jesus and his disciples know these people from the western side of the Sea of Galilee, the same side from where Jesus and the disciples come. Jesus and his disciples would recognize these people from the nearby villages and towns. This crowd worships YHWH just as the disciples and Jesus do. Jesus heals and teaches. And at the end of this long day, Jesus says to his disciples: "Let us go across to the other side."

On the other side, across the Sea of Galilee, lies unknown territory. The people on the *other side* are not Jews. They do not worship YHWH. They do not know Jesus and his disciples. The disciples wonder what changes and challenges will confront them? As if going to the other side were not enough, to get there the disciples must sail the thirteen miles of water which separate the western shore from the eastern banks.

They board a boat and commence crossing. Jesus, tired from his day of ministry, falls soundly asleep in the stern. As he dozes a storm brews up. The wind beats the boat. Waves slosh over the sides. On the verge of foundering, the disciples, in desperation, awaken Jesus with their cries, "teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?!"

Jesus awakens. He rebukes the wind and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And then Jesus asks the disciples, "Why are you afraid?" A naïve question to say the least. The disciples have **TWO very** good reasons to be afraid.

First, there is the immediate fear of the boat sinking in the onslaught of wind and waves, and they will all drown.

Second, travelling to new territory, the other side, contains the fear of the unknown. Late in the day, where will they stay when they arrive? Where will they eat? *What* will they eat? The people on the other side are not Jews. *They* are not kosher. They herd swine-- for heaven's sake! How will the disciples and Jesus be received on the other side? What have they got themselves into?

Returning to Kevin and old man Marley... Mr. Marley longs for reconciliation with his son. He fears his outreach to his son, with its attendant apology and atonement, will be rejected. So, Mr. Marley fails to act, fails to get in the boat and cross over to the other side. He lives longing for a loving relationship, between father and son, parent and child.

Where are we called to "cross over"...in our world and in our lives? What wrongs have we committed as a nation for which we owe apologies and atonement? What countries have we wronged? What people have we harmed with our pragmatism to meet our nation's demands? Who have we left behind in poverty, without health care, without equal rights, as we cater to a wealthy few at the expense of the many? What conflicts of values keep us from acting? What are we afraid of?

The Lake Washington Adult Senior center which met Monday through Friday downstairs in our Fellowship Hall has closed. Why? No state funding. A score of seniors denied care, comfort and activity outside their homes. A half dozen jobs lost.

We read of neighbourhood schools shut down. Daycare centers lose funding. Money for the arts cut back. What is said about how you can judge a society? You can judge a society by its care for its children and elderly. What conflicts of values keep us from acting? What are we afraid of?

Where, in our personal lives, are we called to cross over? Like Marley, have we broken relationships that need mending?... Have we a life style that taxes the environment at the expense of

the planet? Have we closets full of clothes that we no longer wear? Have we garages and basements full of stuff we no longer use? What conflicts of values keep us from acting? What are we afraid of? What are we waiting for?

Recently, I heard of a young couple with two cars. They realized two cars was an extravagance. They could *afford* two cars. Two cars was convenient, but convenience, alone was not justification. Hearing one of those ads by a non-profit organization appealing for vehicle donations; they gave their second car away. Their faith overcame their fear, and they crossed over to a different lifestyle based on different values.

“Let us go across to the other side.” Where are we being called to?

Crossing over to the other side, venturing into new territory, means confronting the possible storms of conflicting values. Whether to stop a war, to mend a sour relationship, to change or simplify a life-style: all of these changes and challenges create anxiety and fear.

We know why we are afraid. So why does the Gospel writer place the question on Jesus' lips, “Why are you afraid?” Is Jesus so wet behind the ears, so naïve, so innocent he does not know fear?

Of course not! Jesus knows fear. He is afraid as his arrest and crucifixion near. Praying in the garden, Jesus cries out because he does not want these violent and stormy events to descend upon him. But Jesus also knows faith. Jesus knows there is more to life than death. He leads us through the stormy waters of life, beyond the shadow of death, into the calm of God's love and the light of God's hope. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil.”

The Good News, indeed, the great news, is not that God saves us or protects us from all harm. That is way too simplistic. That is a denial of the reality of evil in our world. And we know evil, the storms of life, exist. Rather, the Good News, as the psalmist writes, is that “Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.” God is in the boat with us. Always has been, always will be. Why are we afraid?

Let us pray. *God, you call us saying, “Let us cross over to the other side.” We know you are in the boat with us, indeed you are the pilot of our boat. Help us be willing to let go and let you. Give us the courage to overcome our fears, to pass through the storms of life. Fortify us for the tasks ahead, especially those we dread and fear: making apologies, righting wrongs, surrendering those things that possess us that are not good for us, or for others. We give thanks for those many examples from people of faith who have gone before us, not the least, Jesus. We are not alone. Through Christ we pray. Amen.*