

August 7 A 2011 God with Us

The great reformer John Calvin called the Scriptures “the spectacles of the Spirit, a set of eyeglasses for overcoming the nearsightedness of the human condition. As such, a primary way of using the Scriptures is to look through them, not at them.”

For the second week in a row, our Gospel story comes from the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew.

For the second week in a row, we encounter a miracle over nature story.

Today, we will not look at the story.

Instead, we will look through the story and listen for what God is telling us about God and about ourselves.

What does this story tell us about God?

My heart is drawn to the words Jesus spoke to the disciples: TAKE COURAGE, IT IS I. Literally, in the Greek, the words for IT IS I are I AM.

I AM; you’ve heard those words before.

In the great Old Testament story, God spoke to Moses through the burning bush., God said: Come no closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...

Moses said to God, “If I come to the people and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them.”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. You shall say to the people, I AM has sent me to you.”

Ah, the powerful glorious God who is above all names.

I AM. That’s all you need to know.

On the Sea of Galilee, when Jesus approached the boat of disciples, and they thought they were seeing a ghost, Jesus said, “Take heart. I AM.

I am the god of your ancestors, the one who called Moses.”

Jesus is part of the great I AM.

When John the Gospel writer tells the story of Jesus, he uses a lot of I am language.

1. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry.

2. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.
3. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.
4. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
5. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.
6. I am the way and the truth and the life.
7. I am the true vine.

Wonderful, descriptive ways of understanding God in Jesus.

Take heart, Jesus told the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, I AM.

And even the wind obeys him.

Matthew the Gospel writer frames his story of Jesus in this way.

In the very last sentence of the Gospel, Jesus says, "I AM with you always."

The great I AM with you.

The primary characteristic of I AM is with you.

In the middle of the Gospel, in chapter 18, Jesus said: "Where two or three or gathered, I AM there among them."

In the very first chapter of the Gospel, following the opening genealogy, the great prophet Isaiah is quoted to describe the significance of Jesus: "you shall name him Emmanuel, which means God with us."

From the beginning of the gospel to the end, the quality of God evident in Jesus is that God is with us in him.

The whole punch line of Matthew is: I AM there with you.

We can see it when we look through our Gospel story.

Towards the beginning, who is walking on the water to the disciples? Jesus.

In the middle of the story, who is the one who fishes Peter out of the water? Jesus.

At the end of the story, who is in the boat with the disciples? Jesus.

What does this story tell us about God?

From beginning to end, our God is with us in Jesus.

With us when the wind is blowing hard. With us when the sea is calm.

With us when we venture forth. With us when we're sinking down.

With us when we depart in the boat, with us when we travel in the boat, with us when we arrive in the boat. With us.

When we look through this story, and not at it, what do we learn about ourselves?

What does it tell you about what God wants for you?

How are you described in the Gospel story?

The first word for you today: Sent.

You are sent.

The story begins with Jesus making the disciples get in the boat and going out.

Where are they going, and why are they going there?

If you were to read the two verses following the Gospel story, you would learn that the disciples are on their way to Gennesaret.

And what are Jesus and the disciples going to do there?

The same thing they've been doing throughout the region.

Heal and proclaim; in other words, ministry.

The disciples are sent by Jesus to do ministry.

You are a disciple.

You are sent.

Like the Blues Brothers, you are on a mission.

Your mission is to announce through word and action God's love for all people.

A boat has been a long-standing symbol of the Church.

You, the disciples, are in the boat.

You are journeying with Jesus, not for your sake, but for the sake of others.

You have been sent.

When Matthew tells this story, he gives us this wonderful section about Peter.

It is dramatic and intense.

Matthew uses Peter a lot as a kind of exemplar of the Christian life.

Throughout the Gospel, Peter is portrayed as a mixed bag.

He is strong and weak.

He confesses great faith and has little faith.

He is bold and fearful.

He is obedient and self-centered.

In our story today, he is courageous as he walks on water, and fearful as he sinks.

He is focused on Jesus and overwhelmed by his circumstances.

He is daring and bold in faith, and Jesus has to rescue him.

Lord, have mercy.

Like Peter, you are a mixed bag.  
You love the Lord, but sometimes you can't tell.  
You are strong and courageous in faith, and the little things scare you.  
You persevere through great difficulties, and get stuck in your tracks.  
You serve with great heart, and sometimes with little heart.  
You are saint and sinner.  
Together with Peter, you are a mixed bag.  
I can see you in our Gospel story.

There is something else I see about you.  
Looking through the Gospel story, I see that followers worship Jesus.  
Matthew tells us that the disciples worshipped Jesus and declared: "Truly you are the Son of God."  
It's true throughout the Gospel of Matthew.  
From the magi worshipping the Christ Child in chapter two, to the very last chapter, where Jesus sent the disciples out with The Great Commission, Jesus is worshipped.  
That's what disciples do.  
You do that as well.  
In the boat, the church, you gather to be strengthened in God's Word and Sacrament, and to respond with praise and prayer and gratitude and service.  
Disciples that you are called to be, worship the Lord your God.

Finally, our Gospel story is not about a particular person sinking into a particular lake.  
It is a story about the nature of God as the great I AM, who journeys with us in life.  
And it is a story about disciples who are sent in mission, who in spite of their mixed bag, do amazing things, and worship the Lord of life.  
Yes, Lord, Yes, Lord, Yes, Yes, Lord.