



Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2005.

1 Kings 19: 9-13 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14: 22-33

Anyone who has crossed a strait in a storm or been caught in heavy seas will appreciate Matthew's description of the disciples' journey, "the boat was being harassed by the waves."

The Scriptures use the metaphor of storm in prayers and writings to convey the turbulence that is a factor sometime in our lives or the life of our community. Look at Psalm 107 or Job 9:6. Only God, who is Lord of the sea, is able to calm the seas of our distressed hearts.

The early Christian communities, like our own were subject to all sorts of turmoil. There are frightening, disturbing disorienting movements and trends within and without our religious communities. Can we tell "good news" with any certainty?

What does this story tell us about our own journey?

First, we can't manage on our own. The Christian community is nothing without Christ, who is the breath for our sails and the stabilizer of our keel. The disciples were in difficulties because there was a great distance between themselves and Jesus.

A great distance opens between us and Jesus if we neglect our study of the scriptures. If homilists do not keep abreast of new studies we are not excused. There are very good programmes both formal and informal available today. Good news is needed to bring life to our communities. Matthew's community didn't take mark's Gospel without adapting the collection to meet their own needs. We must "read" the Gospels in the light of tradition, scholarship and particularly our own life experiences.

The second point of the story is about our response to troubles. Do we lie low, hoping the storm will pass over or do we respond to the call, "Come"?

The story from Kings tells of a prophet who wanted to hide from the storms in his community. Violence was all about him so he took refuge in a cave. God called him out of the cave to stand on the mountain before him. A strong wind blew up which tore up trees and moved rocks. After the wind there was an earthquake. After the earthquake there was a bush fire. Each time God showed Elijah that none of these signs was a manifestation of the presence of God. God was showing Elijah that God is alongside us in turmoil but God does not cause us turmoil. God is not to be found in displays of power over. This is an important truth for today when some of the so called servants of God use power to effect their will.

After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. When Elijah heard the whisper, he covered his face for he now recognised the presence of God. He also faced the fact that some of his attitudes and methods had been violent.

This moving story reminds us that displays of power do not achieve anything but increased fear. God will be found in the whisper in the heart. God will be found in the quiet working out of peaceful solutions.

Paul touches on the issue where the legacy of violence has tainted generations. Jesus died a good son of Judaism. Succeeding generations have tried to separate Jesus from his roots and in doing so had perpetrated a racism which has not yet been overcome.

The violence around us, insidious racism and overt terrorism which not be resolved until the violence in our hearts has been faced and eradicated. This calls for ongoing conversion of heart.

“Do not be afraid. It is I.”

Patricia Stevenson rsj.