

My grandfather was a lobsterman in Wells, Maine. He went out day after day in his boat, pulled up the lobster traps, braving—many days—a rugged, frigid Atlantic Ocean. And he was terrified of water.

It might come as a surprise to you that many fishermen can't swim. I know, it's odd, but statistics show that something like 70% of people who fish from boats both large and small --cannot swim. Like my grandfather, they are scared to death of the water, but there is no place they would rather be.

When you are on the water, he told me, storms teach you that you are not in charge. You have to have faith.

"Faith tells me to go home during storms," I told him.

"Faith will meet you on the waves," he replied.

In the gospel reading today, the disciples and Jesus are crossing the sea in a boat, getting away from the crowds, and Jesus had fallen into an exhausted sleep in the back of the boat.

A storm comes up. The disciples fear for their lives—they probably can't swim. They wake up Jesus to tell him all their lives are in danger, and how can he just sleep through the storm?

They are even "guilting" him a little—"Don't you even care if we drown??" The storm is bad enough. Jesus ignoring the danger they are in is something else.

Jesus speaks peace to the sea and the wind, and asks his disciples why they were afraid. "Have you still no faith?"

Is Jesus saying that if we just believe in God enough we will never be afraid?

And what does that mean: to have "faith" in God?

To a Hebrew Jew, *like Jesus*, faith meant something very specific: it had three components—all of which had to be operating for faith to be present:

- the capacity to trust,
- the courage to act
- the expectation that God would meet you in that action

All 3 things needed to be present for there to be faith.

When Abraham went out from Ur to form a new people, he left the security of Egypt and went into the insecurity of the wilderness. He trusted God's call, he acted on the call and – most important—he was **confident that God would meet him there**.

When David went out after Goliath, with no armor and 5 smooth stones to meet the giant Philistine, he trusted that God called him to do it, he acted on that trust, **and he expected that God would meet him there**.

*Faith wasn't just about belief in something or even just trust, it was about action—their action, and the confidence that God would meet them in that action.*

***Faith is an action figure.***

Faith ventures out in the storms of life EXPECTING to meet God there. Faith doesn't wait for the Lord to mount a divine rescue.

Jesus knew storms were a part of life, he probably suspected that the disciples lives would never be peaceful—peaceful is for vacations, not life. **Jesus** was fine with trusting God to meet him in the storms of life, but the disciples were not.

And usually we are not. So—how do mere humans build up faith?

One: We help build everyone's capacity to trust. Like children putting their small hands in the hands of their parents, we know that God—like our parents-- will never let us go. Our first experience of trust is within our families. If trust is broken in childhood, it's often never learned.

All humans need to develop the capacity to trust.

Two: We expand our courage to act.

Is it enough to *believe* that God is good. All the time. God is good. Is it enough to *believe* that we are called to love everyone? Is it enough to *believe* that it's important to treat everyone as we would like to be treated?

No. It is not. Faith is an action figure. We learn courage by doing things that scare us a little.

My grandfather learned courage by facing the danger of the sea every day. On any given day he could be swamped by waves he didn't see. He could develop engine trouble far from land. Once he even lost his beloved lab overboard. He determined to backtrack until the dog was safely back on board. He found him where he'd pulled the

last trap. He was still swimming—trusting my grandfather would come back, and then acting on that commitment of trust. Maybe he even expected God to be there with him as he swam.

The point is: my grandfather had committed to working on the water, and it wasn't possible to "believe" the food onto the family's table. He had to act.

And so do we.

We can't believe ourselves into following Jesus, we have to have the courage to commit by **our actions** that we love God, love all, and respect the dignity of every human being.

And most importantly:

3: We need to expect that God will meet us in the world. Because God is everywhere, in everything and everybody.

*"Truly I tell you, when you did not help one of the least of these, you did not help me."*

*And: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."*

God meets us in the world. Through creation, and through every human being.

So.

What could those disciples have done to act on their faith? Well, perhaps rather than wailing in fear and belittling Jesus for not helping more, they could have hunkered down and thrown water out of the boat. They could have roused Jesus and said, "Please help us bail out the boat, because we don't want YOU to die."

When we trust like a child, have courage that only comes from facing our fears, and we believe that God will meet us everywhere—no matter where we are— no matter who we meet--then God indeed will meet us on the waves. Amen.