

12th Sunday of the Year 2021

Parker Palmer in ***A Hidden Wholeness***, writes about living through a storm: '*It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others.*'

We can be discouraged by insensitivity, lies, deceits and actions by political leaders; the endless violence and wars; living in an all too human church unable to change not to mention promoting prejudice, narrow-mindedness before problems, engage in contemporary issues or raise a voice on what really matters. Though we are called to audacious discipleship we can be imprisoned by our limitations or being victims of other people's perceptions. Jesus' invitation, 'Let's cross to the other side' is a call to a different place or world, beyond the one we know and feel safe. We are invited to leave the familiar shores of Capernaum for the strange and foreign shores of the Gerasenes - to a different and unfamiliar place where they are strangers. Jesus knew what they were going to encounter on the other side. He told them to go ahead. To go forward. There was something important for them and us to learn. Left to ourselves, we would probably stay where we are. It is easier to stay in our comfort zones; to default to our pet theologies; our science (climate change) despite the harm it does to others; and to our mislabeling of others such LGBTI+ people, Muslims, refugees (as we saw last week when the mustard seed is mislabeled as a weed).

Jesus does not seem to give the disciples much time to think about the trip. Though we, as communities and individuals, face situations *bigger* than ourselves and where more is going on than we can understand, the readings remind us that God's mercy, wisdom, justice and motivating energy is still also *bigger* and when we trust and allow ourselves to be guided by God's wisdom, more happens than we can ask or imagine. Being calm is such a luxury. Calling for justice is anything but calm. Sometimes Jesus' call has an intrusive quality. We have to be flexible and adaptable because we do not know when God will expand our life to see other shores. Many people anchor their lives on familiar shores by committing too much of their energy to cautious preparation—when God may want to move instantaneously. Too often people of conscience and good will deliberate themselves into stagnation. We spend our energy thinking about divine directives and invitations instead of pursuing them. It can be dangerous to spiritualize

inaction. We can clutter our hearts with thoughts that weigh down our feet and cuff our hands.

When Paul says, 'The love of Christ impels us!' there is an urging from within either from instinct or deep conviction. Such a conclusion about Christ's love means that nothing could ever be the same. It means looking upon others and creation differently. They are a new creation.

Last week we were called to sow the little seeds of a new humanity that will make a difference in our world and peoples' lives. As with the Plenary Council, God calls us to have the courage to 'get into the boat and go to the other side' where we face problems, ask questions, engage with contemporary issues and speak up for what is human, compassionate, justice and right. Jesus does not want us to live on one side of the lake for too long. Getting to the other side is no easy trip. That change, trading spaces, is rarely without its challenges as is depicted in the rough crossing. Many of us, especially those connected with the hierarchy, are being called to let go, to cross over, to see differently, to make space for something new and uncomfortable. The church of the laity!! Despite its past sins, the church still wants to stay on safe and comfortable ground. Sr Joan Chittister, as many contemporary prophetic voices are calling to make that move and get into the boat and cross over. The miracle was the disciples getting into the boat – not the calming the storm. God's power is not about controlling creation or people but being in relationship with us; in journeying with us despite our fumbling around. God's power is in inviting us to build a reign or kin-dom of love, peace and justice. God's power is not in the obliterating evil but in empowering us to build something good in this world.

In Mark, Jesus shows up in liminal places-places of transition or risk. He goes to marginal spaces such as a graveyard, a deathbed, or on a cross. He positions himself at geographical boundary-lands such as the wilderness, mountaintops, and places like Tyre and Caesarea Philippi. He goes to politically charged locations like a tax collector's home and the land outside of Jerusalem during Passover. His ministry is in these liminal places and opens minds to new possibilities and the freedom to enter into a new future. To him, no place is desolate. No one is abandoned. This involves welcoming outsiders and disadvantaged people, restoring community, exposing the lies that prop up counterfeit standards of greatness, and defeats death. Nothing can inhibit his desire to do ministry on 'the

other side. It means living into a new reality. A change of location can result in a change of perspective – how we see others and how they see us.

For people in chaos, in terrorised communities, the hope is that the Reign of God extends over even the most daunting expression of chaos. It presses our sensibilities and expectations, but it offers the hope that even the chaos can be brought to order.

The world needs us, Jesus-people, to awaken from our violent slumber and speak with the unimpeachable authority of our teacher. While all the world loses its head, we can shut up the forces of chaos if we dare open our mouths and speak.

Leaving the satisfaction of tested shores and undertaking a journey toward the unknown - toward new shores - will deepen our humanity and contextualize our prophetic agenda. Going to the 'other side' is to the places where stigmatised, marginalised, and demonised people live - as we will see in the encounter with the Gerasene demoniac. We go to them. God's work is rooted in our encounters with them. Last week I referred to the violence of organised forgetting where powerful and hegemonic groups render whole classes of people invisible. The others just live across a lake, yet there is a world of difference separating them from the disciples. This is the case where people living in the next town or suburb or in the apartment next door or the room across the hall live in socially constructed worlds apart. James Cone refers to these others as being under 'the threat of nonbeing.' A stigma can make human beings invisible. We need to make visible what is invisible - the dispossessed, disinherited, and disaffected. Love challenges the politics of exclusion. Love shrinks the distance between shores. The authentic embrace of difference challenges our values and our moral nerve center.

Creative encounters save us from projected senses of superiority, tragic blind spots, and the logic of normativity. It is criminal to be too cautious when our vision for a better world requires the creative encounters of other shores—people, ideas, values, and practices unaligned with what we hold to be absolute. Emmanuel Levinas says we know God—the sacred—when we encounter the face of the other. He writes, *'The face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death.'* The face of the other demands that we do more and be more for the ones who are not us. Through the face of the

other, God invites us into a binding community of love. Life-enhancing beauty emanates from the faces of others. The struggling moral health depends on our courage to see the other, to stare at the face of the other and find transcendence in difference.

There are many ways in which we can seclude ourselves on the shores of safety and sameness. World Refugee Day challenges this. As political leaders tell refugees, 'do not come', the stories of courageous, organised resistance to the past oppressors bear repeating. The efforts of a French pastor can serve as one example. André Trocmé was trouble for those favouring war and violence. During World War II, he was sent to a remote parish in the French mountains because of his pacifist views. When France was invaded, Trocmé discovered he was in a unique position to join the international network of people resisting the Nazis and Jewish persecution. With his wife and others in the village, they created a series of safe houses for fleeing Jews. On arrival they were welcomed into homes as if they were family members. Children were enrolled under false names in local schools. When the authorities realised what was happening, the gendarmes were sent to search the village. When asked for a list of Jews, Trocmé replied, 'We do not know what a Jew is. We only know (men).' Between 1940-1945, the village saved the lives of an estimated [3,500-5,000 Jewish refugees](#).

Refugees continue to flee violence, civil war, airstrikes, terrorist groups, and extreme repression. As governments ban refugees, citizens rise up, non-violently and defiantly, to welcome refugees. The moral obligation of compassion is clear. All the cruel oppressors throughout history, must be resisted non-violently in order to make our communities havens for those fleeing violence and death. May we open our hearts and homes to provide sanctuary in the midst of the storms of violence and war to our sisters and brothers, even going to great risks to assure that our common humanity is not destroyed by the bigotry and hatred of the times. Resistance to the leaders of Europe, Australia and the USA requires opening our hearts to those being persecuted by the politics of hatred. This means Muslims, refugees, immigrants, homeless, the poor, and a great many more. We find ourselves in times of crisis, being required to do extraordinary acts in the midst of our ordinary human lives. Like Trocmé, we each have this capacity within us, a seed of compassion just waiting to unfurl.

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