

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

13 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“Walk on Water”

The author of Chapter 37 of the Book of Genesis has a problem. He already knows, because he is writing in the 10th century BC, that the greatest event in Jewish history is the escape from Egypt. His problem in Ch 37 is explaining what they were doing there in the first place. How on earth did Israel ever find itself slaves in Egypt and for 400 years? That is a vast expanse of time. 400 years is almost twice the entire history of the USA. The writer explains it by coming up with the story of Joseph and his brothers.

It may well be true and to the letter, but 400 years before Moses and the Exodus, something else happened in the Middle East. The Hittite Empire moved south and took control of the whole of Egypt and ruled for 200 years. The Hittites were great traders and they employed the Hebrews to run and operate their trade, business and merchandise. That is the real reason for the Hebrew nation being in Egypt so long. But it is no where as attractive as the story of the boy who had dreams and saw visions. The boy who was the favorite of his Father and was given so much responsibility, that Jacob made for him a coat as a sign of his esteem and position.

The relationship of Joseph and Jacob is a special one, and it is broken and shattered by his brothers' act of envy and the news of his death that they carry back to Jacob.

The story has so many parallels. Jesus one day tells the story of the Prodigal Son in Simon's house surrounded by sinners, tax collectors, Pharisees and scribes.

In the story, the Father is really Jacob standing at the gate day after day awaiting the return of his beloved son, Joseph. When he sees him a long way off he runs to greet him.

What happens next makes every Jew sit up and recognize that Jesus is truly retelling the Joseph story. He tells them that the Father orders the servants to fetch a cloak, a coat and put it on him; a ring on his finger, and sandals for his feet.

When he does this, he returns to Joseph, all that he has lost, his position, his relationship with his Father and his recovery from slavery. Then they go inside and celebrate a meal that looks and sounds like the Passover Feast.

Why did Jesus tell the story? The scribes and Pharisees are enormously hurt by it, because they come out as the wicked brothers, the real bad guys. Jesus is telling them that what happened with Joseph 17 hundred years ago is happening again with their rejection of him as the Messiah.

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

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Like Joseph, Jesus will be betrayed by his brothers and dragged off into captivity. He will be stripped of his robes, and torn from family and father. His role as Messiah and Son of God will be desecrated and the history of Passover and Exodus will be lost because of envy.

The stories of Joseph and Jesus are stories of belonging and who is the heir to love and relationship with God. The Pharisees think that they are the ones because they keep the rules and open the law. Jesus teaches that obeying “man-made” rules is not as important as love.

St. Paul, in Chapter 10 of Romans, could not agree more. He knows that the big question is: “Who truly belongs to the Kingdom of God?” Is it those who really live by what they believe? Is it those who carry the word of God in their heart?

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart, because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

I want you to imagine this morning that Jesus enters this church and walks up to the front. He says to you all: “On this altar I have 50 robes, 50 rings and 50 pairs of sandals and I will give them to anyone, who believes and lives my word, belongs to my Kingdom, and has a deep relationship with my Father.”

Now ask yourself. At the end of that service, how will I be dressed leaving church that morning? Will I be robed in bright colors? Will there be a ring of God’s love on my finger? Will I have the sandals of a free person on my feet? Will I be wearing the symbols of the Kingdom, the symbols of sonship, the dress of love? “How beautiful are the feet of those, who bring good news.”

In the Gospel story Mt 14, Jesus comes to the Apostles in the boat walking on water. The story is deeply symbolic. It asks the same question: “Do you belong with Jesus? Can you walk in his ways? Can you ride out every storm? Can you overcome impossible odds, because you too are a child of God? You too belong. You too are a son or daughter of God; you are an heir to his Kingdom.”

Today’s readings are about belonging. They tell us that when our faith lies in our head, with out residing in our heart, our only resort is to cry out” “Lord, save me.”

But with faith and awareness that God as Father has vested us with robes of his Kingdom and that we wear the ring of his love, we are capable of anything in working for the coming of the Kingdom to which we belong.

Today’s Gospel asks us all, as Christians, what are you going to be? Are you going to be a spectator looking in on the Kingdom or are you going to truly belong to it? We can ask the

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same question in terms of the parish. Do you look at the work and ministry of the parish from the outside or are you truly a part of God's work. Do you belong? Do you belong to a social club with nice people or are you invested and have ownership in all that goes on in this living breathing continuation of Christ's work.

Are you sinking beneath the waves every time you are challenged to give of your time and effort or can you too walk on water?

Who will wear the robe, own the ring, walk in the sandals of the Master?

Poor Joseph did not have many choices as events were forced on him. The Apostles had a choice because Christ challenged them to walk in his footsteps and do what he would do.

Today, as your Pastor, I challenge you to respond to your God in your life in this parish, and to not leave pledging, Vestry, and ministry to the few willing souls year after year. I challenge you to stand and climb out of "the boat of your comfort zone" and walk on water.

Do that and love will hold you up. Love always holds you up. Love finds the time, love makes the effort, love consecrates the moment and with it the work.

If after five years, I have not convinced you of that, then I have failed. But if I have convinced you and you know it in your hearts deep core, then with St Paul we can say:

"We have fought the good fight, we have finished the race,"

We just need to see the fruit of our love and efforts transform this parish and make it a place where love reigns, our love of God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ reigns, and our love for one another is daily evident..

So our sending forth prayer this morning does not end with the words:

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." Our sending prayer must say:

"Go in love, walk on water. Do that and we will never walk alone."

AMEN+

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