

Proper 14 Year A 2026

I have been preaching for some twenty five years. Twenty two years here at All Saints preceded by three years of preaching at my field placement parish while in seminary. I've had a few guest gigs at other churches along the way, a couple of ordinations. I've even preached in a bar. Along with administering the sacraments and pastoral care, preaching is what we priests do.

Preaching is proclamation. That's what the Latin root of the word means... proclamation. And that proclamation, by definition, is a public event. That is to say that the so-called word of God is meant to be engaged in community. The charge of the preacher is to proclaim the Good News of God as it is contained in both Hebrew and New Testament scripture, with the understanding that there is a theological basis, a theological context that shapes the ancient writers' agenda. And such context is rooted in the culture and literature of Judaism from the fifth century B.C.E. until well after the first century of the Common Era. Scripture owes as well to Platonic thought, and to Egyptian and Zoroastrian lore. Proclamation then, requires interpretation; interpretation based on the writer's agenda, as best as that can be discerned; and based on the writer's world, its mores, its ethos... what's happening in the world of the text being written... and then to bring our own post-modern world into the conversation, which includes new knowledge,

new revelation, lived experience over the centuries. My homiletics professor called the process: mining for gold. In other words, the homily, the sermon is much more than what “Jim” thinks, it is hopefully a scholarly interpretive process by which the good news is proclaimed as relevant in our own day and age, based on an intelligent study of scripture, knowledge of the tradition, and that it is reasonable. That’s why we have seminaries and biblical scholarship. What I’m trying to say is that proclamation is part of a larger process rooted in the biblical tradition of the church.

The literalism of the fundamentalist tradition; a relatively new phenomenon in western Christian culture, undermines that process. The literature that we call scripture belongs to a range of genres: poetry, moral teaching, allegory, myth, fantasy. Some to be taken literally, like, for example, the admonition to welcome the immigrant as one of our own family; but then much more that requires informed, and imaginative speculation... in symbol and metaphor. Scripture is much more an art than it is a science... felt, perhaps, more than understood.

Over my years as a preacher I have tried to preach the Good News as something believable. Something we may believe with integrity. I have found

myself saying of late.... That God is not supernatural, that God doesn't belong to some other world apart from our own... but that God is radically natural, that God inhabits our world, infuses our world with meaning and therefore purpose, and hope. Is there no such thing as the miraculous, you ask? Yes, there is the miracle of nature, which is the very miracle of God. So in that regard, there is no magic in scripture, rather there is truth awaiting interpretation; waiting to be made new and relevant. Literalism, as a practice, inhibits the interpretive process. Taking many of the mythic and allegorical stories literally ignores the greater meaning, impedes the writer's intent, indeed undermines the very good news we hope to find and share.

Today's reading in Matthew is one of those stories that points beyond itself. Certainly, not to be lost in literalism... A strange story. An allegory to be sure. Matthew evokes the archetypal tension between humankind and the sea, the original nemesis. Daunting to God in the beginning, I suspect. The sea, both Chaos and tranquility. Unbound possibility. Ambiguous. The sea both deadly and life-giving; home for the Leviathan, and the source of nurture. The sea, the primal chaos over which God moved in the beginning bringing order, and life itself.... And death. The idea of the sea lives in our collective unconscious memory, a profound mystery of beginnings and endings, evoked in the literature and lore of humanity

over the ages... Homer's *Odyssey*, a voyage at sea (now all the rage)... Melville's *Moby Dick*, humankind's obsession with the chaos with which we contend.... The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a journey upon the divine imagination... tales told of humankind's entanglement with the dangerous and redemptive ambiguity that is life on earth. And then there's the boat, that ingenious vessel by which humankind travels the mystery, risky and ecstatic. If nothing else, the boat is a symbol of conscious community up and against the primordial chaos. In a boat, the tension between life and death are intimately proximate; and one must of dire necessity forbear and trust one's shipmates. A sea voyage demands collaboration, intentionality... some luck. One deals with the unpredictability of the sea, not alone, but with the collective ingenuity of our fellow voyagers.

In our story today in Matthew's Gospel, the disciples are confronted with the chaos and terror of the sea. They have a ghostly vision of Jesus walking on the water, and Peter asks to get out of the boat and walk to the figure of Jesus. He begins to sink... and Jesus challenges his lack of faith. Now you and I have heard this story countless times. And you and I have heard it preached countless times as well. The sermon goes something like this: Peter if you had just enough faith you would not have almost drowned. And, the preacher goes on... good people, have the faith that allows us to walk on water with Jesus. Your faith, if you have

enough, will help you triumph over the chaos. But that interpretation is amiss, and probably owes its reasoning to countless literalist interpretations over the years... Notice that the sea calms when Jesus and Peter both return to the boat. I imagine Jesus asking Peter, “My Brother, why did you get out of the boat?” Didn’t you know you would drown? Have faith in your shipmates. Stay in the boat. Trust the ingenuity of the vessel. I am present in the crew, in the community of the faithful. Trust us.

The church, the community of faith, across all traditions, is the ship; crewed of seasoned sailors, and fools as well. We face the chaos of our world as a people, not as a person. When we are exhausted from rowing, there are those to take our place. When we are outside of the sight of land, the stars will guide us. We are changed, transformed by the sea-voyage. We are not the same when we return to land... nothing teaches the wiles of the sea like experience, risk, and blessing.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is not a ghostly icon aloof and apart. Jesus lives in the heart of community, worthy of our trust, worthy of our courage. Stay in the boat good people, trust your fellow mariners. The sea is vast and dangerous, but holds great promise, great beauty, infinite possibility, and the mystery of God Godself.

And on this voyage, we take in to our ship those who are drowning in the abusive sorrow of the world. We claim for the crew, our trusted people, those cast away from the world's abundance. We resist the siren's song of power and wealth for their own sake, and live for the sake of the voyage....We are the hope of those lost at sea... Let us pray for fair winds and the courage to endure the storms... And perhaps, one fine day, in God's time, we will see just on the horizon the land called home.