

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 21st 2015

I spent last weekend on the prairies of Nebraska in the center of the U.S. There, on the windswept plains, I watched clouds forming and the sun setting slowly behind the endless skyline. I love thunderstorms and that night, I was awakened by a wonderful, raucous storm, louder than I ever remember. Grateful that I was not standing on the prairie at that moment, I rolled over in my warm bed and went back to sleep feeling protected and secure. But not all storms make us feel safe.

In today's first reading Job, in the middle of a fierce storm, has been complaining to God – complaints that God described as Job's "proud waves." The overwhelming humbling of Job is the way God brings humility to him: "Here shall your proud waves be stilled!"

Too often we blame God for our problems and it takes real humility to realize that God is God. God loves us beyond our understanding, and that love will calm our hearts – but first we have to trust. The first words of the reading bring us that good news, "The Lord addressed Job out of the storm." It's easy to feel prayerful and trusting in God when all is going well in our lives. But, it's in the middle of the storm where we are most likely to listen to God speaking to us.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus and his disciples have gotten into boats to cross the water. While a violent storm whips up and threatens to swamp the small vessels, Jesus is curled up sleeping at the back of the boat. He has the calm and peace we so often long for because Jesus lives in total trust in God.

Sometimes we find ourselves in that graced place, feeling cherished and held closely to God's heart, and we have a sense that there is nothing that we can't face with that sense of God at our side. Then the crisis is over and our human independence asserts itself again ... and our reliance on God ebbs away.

Jesus' untrusting disciples ask a question that is ironic when we know the rest of the story:

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus is, in fact, inviting us to die with him. Die to our fears. Die to ourselves. Die to our needs. He's asking us to be bold, to rebuke the wind and rain which terrify his people.

Once we really live our lives as Jesus followers and take his message deeply into our hearts, our lives can't be the same. We have followed Jesus into the deep waters and "we no longer live for ourselves." We are being asked to make a new life as his followers. "The old things have passed away; behold, new things have come," the letter to the Corinthians tells us.

Being Christians means we can let all things be new because we have already died by becoming one with Jesus. To live in that one-ness is to live in a real freedom that let's everything be new.

I am writing this just days before Pope Francis will release his long-awaited environmental encyclical, "On Caring for our Common Home." He joins his papal predecessors in warning of our continuing damage to the earth, and pointing out that it is the poorest of our brothers and sisters who suffer for that mistreatment of our common home.

May we feel cherished by God in the storms in our lives, and follow the lead of Pope Francis in not

putting our own needs and sense of entitlement ahead of the needs of the poor of this world.

Maureen McCann Waldron-Creighton University Collaborative Ministry Office