Lynnewood United Methodist Church, Pleasanton, CA
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The Other Side of the Lake

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Scripture Reading: Luke 8:22-25

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, **23** and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. **24** They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. **25** He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

There's a scene in one of my favorite movies that comes to mind. It's from *Motorcycle Diaries*, a film about a young doctor who embarks on a journey throughout South America. At a point in the movie, this doctor is in the Amazon forest in Peru working for a Catholic agency that provides medical care for people who suffer from leprosy. We are on the margins of the river: on one side is where the church building is and where all the doctors, nurses, nuns and priests are. On the other side of the river live the lepers—many of them. The scene is not unfamiliar from us: the lepers are cast out of society, much like in some scenes in the gospel.

At a point in the movie, the main character—his name is Ernesto—is celebrating his birthday. We're on this side of the river. Everyone is having a good time. But he decides to go out

for a moment and the scene captures him staring at the other side of the river, where a small light shines—there where the lepers live. It's dark and the river is very wide. But Ernesto removes his shirt and starts to swim: "I want to celebrate my birthday on the other side." He swims and as he swims the sound of his breathing is what we hear. He is breathless, tired, and at some point it seems like we are breathless and tired too. The scene makes us deeply aware of our own breathing and at a point I catch myself breathing with Ernesto, almost as if I could breath for him. We breath together as Ernesto swims across to the other side.

"Let us cross to the other side."

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus is forever on the move, walking from one village to the other, meeting with people, always in route to Jerusalem. In the previous chapters, Luke shows Jesus healing people, sharing meals with Pharisees, being anointed by a woman deemed impure, telling parables about the Reign of God, crossing borders. You seem this Jesus whenever he sees a border and walls: he is ready to cross them. Whenever he sees an "impure" person he is ready to embrace them and reconcile them with the love of God.

And then we come to this scene: Jesus invites his disciples to join him in crossing to the other side of the lake.

Luke calls this a "lake" but most Palestinians would call it a "sea"—the Sea of Galilee. And it is a dreaded place. In the ancient world, particularly in the Middle East, seas are places that guard some evil spirits, symbols of something so powerful that at any moment can rise to devour us—even in our sleep. Remember how the book of Revelation, for example, prophesizes about a day when the sea shall be no more (Rev 21:1). The sea is a scary place.

And yet the invitation is: let us go across to the other side. Let us gather together on this boat and let us go across this scary place together. **In this image, the boat is this vessel**

that carries us through the places we fear the most. It is where our fears and doubts come before us.

The history of the Methodist movement is marked by such a moment like this. On his journey across the seas on his way to the American colonies, John Wesley, one of the founding figures of the Methodist movement, found himself in the midst of a great storm. And, like the disciples, he feared for his life. His life was in danger. And he was faced with a troubling truth: he lacked the faith necessary to journey across to the other side of the ocean. He lacked the kind of assurance of faith that says that, however strong the storm is, a holy presence is there with us. In Wesley's case, this comfort came through the witness of a group of German Moravians who sang hymns of praise in the midst of the storm.

This was not a way of denying the perils posed by the storm. But it was a way of recognizing that we shall not allow fear to orient our lives during a storm. We shall not remain asleep while our boat is sinking. But we shall stand together singing hymns of a new day. We shall not despair when the winds blow against us. But we shall stand together knowing that our wind blows in different directions. For the Spirit of God is the wind that directs this boat.

For good reasons, one of the symbols of the church is the boat. Very early historical records show how already in the second century Christians were speaking of the Christian community as a boat. You may have heard, for example, that in Christian architecture the main portion of a sanctuary is referred to as a *nave*—a word that in Latin simply means a *ship*. And the symbol makes sense.

In this space we call church we gather together not to be comfortable, not to remain anchored at the docks. **We gather together so that we can cross to the other side. We gather together so that we can face the challenges of turbulent waters. We gather together so that we may face our fears**

and doubts together. The church is a moving reality, a body of people that embrace the task of crossing to the other side.

And so I invite you: let us go across to the other side.

The scarred disciples scream: "Master, master, we are perishing!" But Jesus rebukes the storm and the waters calm down. But it appears that the hearts of the disciples remained troubled, much like the sea during the storm. Jesus asks the disciples: "Where is your faith?" It's as if they still want the comfort of life on solid land.

Where is our faith? The disciples seem to think that it must be on either side of the lake—on some place solid, like a building, like a temple. But the Christian faith seems to be on this small boat, swimming across troubled waters, facing storms.

The greatest Brazilian novelist of the 20th century once wrote: "*I tell you: reality is neither a beginning nor an end; it surges to us in the middle of the crossing.*" In our story, it is in the crossing to the other side of the lake that the disciples learn something about Jesus—the Christ. God comes to us neither in the beginning nor in the end. The crossing is the place where God comes. From slavery in Egypt to the promised land: God in the middle. On the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus: Christ was there on the way. On our crossing over to the other side: God reveals to us who God is.

And so I invite you, again: let us go across to the other side.

We are on this boat together. This boat we call the church community, on this crossing we call the life of faith. Can you see a small light shining on the other side? What fears are you facing during this crossing? What lies there for you, on the other side of the lake?

This has been a turbulent week. We might as well say that we have gone through a massive windstorm that hit us late at

night while we were asleep. Water is filling our boat. We are in danger. It is possible that some of us woke up on Wednesday shouting: "we are perishing!" Sadly, some indeed might be perishing. I'm sure you heard stories about this. Perhaps you have witnessed something.

Where is our faith?

On the movie, Ernesto reaches the other side after battling through the deep and troubled waters of the river. He is greeted by the lepers, those who are forced to live on the other side. **Those against which we raise walls and bans and prohibitions and prejudices.** Toward those who live on the other side—that's where the wind blows. Toward those who have been rejected, excluded—that's where the grace of God stirs our boat. Toward the other side—that's where our faith leads.