

Don't blame the disciples; this wasn't their idea.

Let us go across to the other side, says Jesus, which sounds innocuous enough, but he says it from the safety of the shore at the end of the day.

When he first stood on this shore and said follow me, he never said it would be across the stormy lake at night to the other side.

This was before boats had headlights, and there were no lighthouses on the Sea of Galilee.

There was no red at night to assure sailor's delight, and no weather.com to assure a calm evening for passage.

And there was certainly no imaginable hurry to get to the other side.

On this side of the lake, Jesus was a popular teacher and things were going well.

On the other side was the country of the Gerasenes, full of Gentiles as far removed from the ways of God as the other side of the lake, strange, unclean, unrighteous, unchosen people with whom they had no business.

Listen to Mark describe what awaits them when they arrive:

immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him.

He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain;

for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.

Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

That's just the chamber of commerce.

Once you get by the welcoming committee, you meet the pig farmers, which for a good kosher Jewish boy is no improvement.

Jesus heals the demoniac, and finds him some clothes, and the unclean spirits drive the unclean pigs off a cliff into the lake, and the swineherds learn that their assets are suddenly liquid.

The story wraps up with verse 17: *Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.*

Now aren't the disciples glad they almost died in a storm to go enjoy that?

Don't blame the disciples; it wasn't their idea.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves, and isn't that easy for us to do?

Jesus calms the storm in only seven verses, so we move through it in a minute or two, the way we try to glide through all of the things that swamp our little boats and beat into our souls.

The church in its ancient wisdom has long resonated with this story, building sanctuaries in the shape of capsized boats and naming the place where the people sit the nave, from the Latin word for *ship*, from which we also get our word *navy*.

The church is the boat full of Jesus and his frightened friends, ever on its perilous way to some other side...to the other side of the lake, the other side of the world, the other side of time and fear and common sense, to every strange, unsafe horizon we disciples have no need to explore except that the persistent promptings of Jesus to push beyond our comfortable present and go to the other side keep urging us on and urging us out.

It is never our idea to cross the lake to another culture or language or lifestyle or world,
especially when we know with the pure certainty born only of ignorance and secondhand
judgment that it is populated with the godless and unclean.

If the whole world is saved by the relentless reach of God's love, don't blame us; it wasn't our
idea.

We can only be blamed for being dumb enough to get into the boat with Jesus, to go along when
he looked at us on the shore and said Follow Me.

Now here we are in the boat, and the Resurrection history timeline in the parish hall and the
weather-beaten faces among us will tell you that it has been bounced through plenty of
angry storms already, and surely there are more to come.

When our vision team helps us discern together where it is God is calling us, God's track record
tells us that it will probably be across the lake to someplace we'd rather not go...maybe
even across the lake out in our street into the tempestuous and demon-infested world.

For now, though, there is plenty to terrify us.

What makes this story so haunting and so real is the same thing that brings such dark
power to the story of Noah, the poetry of Job, and the recent history of New Orleans: the
primal and chaotic and unstoppable power of water.

The Bible was written by land lovers; no ancient historian ever sang the praises of the Jewish
Navy.

What makes creation and baptism and stories of floods and lake storms so powerful is that God's
people Israel were absolutely, white knuckle terrified of drowning.

What terrifies you?

What beats against your vessel late in the night and scares you to your soul?

What threatens you so deeply and destructively that you cry out to Jesus in the night your version
of *Do you not care that we are perishing?*

Because that is most likely where Jesus is calling you...to go there, and to get to the other side.

The only thing scarier in this story than the nighttime windstorm is the one who stills it.

Today Jake Nicholas LaRocco will be baptized into this Christ and carried on board the
ancient and rickety boat with us.

Don't blame him; it's not his idea.

I will understand if he fusses and cries; who would willingly sign up for this?

Whenever Mel Clawson tells me exactly how few babies have cried when I baptized them, a part
of me wonders whether I have failed to explain things adequately to them.

Do the parents and godparents realize whose voice it is calling at the water's edge, *Follow Me?*

There will be a not so subtle signature glistening in oil on Jake's forehead: the sign of the cross.

The gospel of Mark is the story of a gathering windstorm that leads Jesus to his knees in
the middle of the night.

He prays to his God in the teeth of a storm: I'll go, but this wasn't my idea.

He wakes Peter from sleep: *Could you not stay awake with me one hour?*

Do you not care that I am perishing?

Before long, the cock will crow and Peter will run away.

There is no one left to stand up for Jesus and say to the tempest around him, *Peace, be still.*

The soldiers and the scoffers swamp him and beat against him.

He does not survive the storm.

But he does make it to the other side.

When the women come to the tomb to put oil on his forehead, the ones dressed in white tell them that he is raised from the dead, that he is safe on the other side of that impossible crossing that is never our idea.

They say, *Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*

And Peter.

Jesus does not bail on the one who bailed on him.

Whether or not he bails us out, he does not bail on us, even when we who still have no faith bail on him.

Jake Nicholas, welcome aboard.

You may or may not prove to have the stomach for the sea; you may or may not stay in the boat with Jesus.

But he has sailed in your human skin and whether you like his ideas or not, he will stay in the boat with you and take you where you never thought you'd want to go.

And one day, many storms and stories and fearful passages from now, you will get to the other side, and you will see Him, face to breathtaking face, and wonder *Who then is this?*

Peace, dear boy; be still.

You are safely home.