

Creation 1 (Ocean) Year C: 14 & 15 September 2019  
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY  
The Reverend Gary Cyr

**“We are talking about drawing people into a life in relationship with God. A relationship with the same God who moved over the waters of chaos bringing calmness and order. A relationship with the same God who disturbed Noah and all creation with an earth-changing flood that transformed the landscape. A relationship with life itself. One devoid of those things that separate us, especially from the love of God.”**

Job 8: 1-8

Ephesians 1: 3-10

Luke 5: 1-11

Psalms 104: 25-26, 28-32, 35

One of the assumptions most people make when they learn I am a native son of the State of Maine, is that everyone in the State lives near the ocean. It is difficult for them to imagine that, in reality, most Mainers live in the landlocked areas of the state, many miles from the coast. Though that is true, I do love the ocean, especially as it crashes upon the walking-trails in Southwest Harbor on Mount Desert Island – one of my favorite coastal spots. However, I am not much of a boater. That was evident when, in late May, my partner joined me in Brattleboro, VT for a long weekend where I went kayaking for the first time (Tavi, my partner, is a much more seasoned kayaker than I am). That being the case, we decided on a kayak for two where you row in tandem with each other. Needless to say, it was a learning experience for both of us, and gratefully, he didn't dump me in the waters we were traversing (though from the tone of his voice he was dearly tempted to on more than one occasion).

The waters that fine day in May were calm, unlike the Atlantic Ocean with which I am more familiar, especially as it encounters the rugged coastline of Maine. The North Atlantic is anything but calm. These experiences remind me that water is both beautiful and dangerous. That the surface can be so calm as to be ultra-reflective which belies the fact that it can also churn with such force that it becomes destructive. This very substance that is essential to all life

also holds the power to disrupt life. No wonder it is often biblically used as a metaphor for God. For God is understood as both calming as well as disturbing with the latter being of greater importance. You see, calming is a good thing, but it is when we are disturbed that interesting things happen.

I do not know what the day was like when Jesus approached Simon Peter, James, and John. All I know is that Jesus made a request of them that they fulfilled. Simon Peter could have said no to Jesus. After all, he and his friends had just gotten back to shore after a fruitless night on the sea fishing. He, as well as his companions, must have been tired. Did he even know who Jesus was? Possibly. He may have heard that there was an itinerate rabbi wandering about in the area whose rhetoric captured the imagination of the local peasantry. I can only speculate how exhausted Simon Peter must have been when Jesus approaches him to make the request, and for whatever reason, Simon Peter allows him to step into his boat and they put out from shore. I also understand why Jesus sat down in the boat – stepping into a small water craft is tricky much less standing up in one, which is a recipe for capsizing the craft and being plunged everyone into the water. One of the learnings from kayaking experience. But it is what happens after Jesus has spoken to the crowd that I find interesting.

Rather than return to shore, Simon Peter is tasked with going out into deep waters. And, once again, Simon Peter obliges. That, in and of itself, is very telling. You see, throughout this narrative, Jesus assumes the risk. In this particular encounter, he risks being rejected, of being told no. It is an unassuming engagement with subtle yet real risks – not to Simon Peter and his companions, but to Jesus. The result of this unassuming encounter is that possibility opens up - principally, that being a relationship with God. This is what is happening in this story: God takes the initiative and the risk as God beckons us into relationship. Think about that for a moment – God takes the initiative (it is Jesus who asks Simon Peter for a favor) and the risk (Jesus knows he might be denied his request, after all, we have the freedom to say no) as God beckons us into relationship (Jesus further engages with Simon Peter and his companions beyond that primary request). The moral of the story is this: when we encounter others, especially those across the divide – those who differ from us, whatever those differences may be – the outcomes are unpredictable. Jesus continues throughout his ministry to take risks

knowing the outcomes are unpredictable. And that is so different and difficult for so many of us who rely on the tried and true, never risking our surety or security, especially for those “others” – the ones over there who live in that town, the ones on that street in that particular home, the individual over there in that pew: the unfamiliar face in a sea of conformity. However, Jesus takes this story even further.

Go out into deep waters, Jesus says. Leave the surety of the shore and put out into deep waters where storms can arise at any moment, where things are uncertain and outcomes unknown. Heed my words; take a risk. That is what Jesus is saying. Now contrast that with our own penchant for predictability and routine. We like the familiar routine because we do not have to think about. It is safe. Yet, Jesus is inviting us, just as he did his earliest disciples, to venture onto new ground, into new depths and be open to new challenges.

Playing it safe, is not what this story is about. Rather, this story is about taking risks in order to foster new relationship. It is about casting our nets wide recognizing the unpredictability of such an act. We do not know the outcome of such an act. Nor should we. If we did, then we fall prey to routine predictability rather than place our trust in God, who is the true source of life. And that is what Simon Peter and company hauled in their nets that fateful day: life.

They caught so many fish their nets were about the break. We can almost visualize that scene, yet if we focus on that alone, we miss the point. What they hauled from the sea, from the ocean, was life itself: abundant life. The metaphor continues. If Jesus is the water of life, and God is the source of the water, then what is drawn from that water is life itself – life in God. When we cast the net to “catch people” we are not talking about filling our pews, balancing our budget, or roping in new volunteers. We are talking about drawing people into a life in relationship with God.

A relationship with the same God who moved over the waters of chaos bringing calmness and order. A relationship with the same God who disturbed Noah and all creation with an earth-changing flood that transformed the landscape. A relationship with life itself. One devoid of those things that separate us, especially from the love of God.

That is what I experience on the coast of Maine when I stand feet away from the pounding surf as ocean waves crash upon the rocky shoreline. The power and majesty of the ocean reminds me of God's own majestic power and I stand in humble awe of that. Sometimes, the ocean is frightening; other times, it is serene. Regardless of its state, it holds life. A life Jesus invites me into – us into. A life filled with chaos and uncertainty as well as peace and serenity.

Heed my words, Jesus says; take the risk and move into deep waters casting your net into the ocean of life. Push away from your certitude and routine, from those things which hold you back from God's invitation for relationship. Remember, it is God who takes the initiative and assumes the risk. So, how will you reply to Jesus' request to enter the boat and journey into deep waters?