

Proper 7 in Year B, June 20, 2021  
Christ Church Valdosta, GA  
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“On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them: “Let us go across to the other side.” With these words, Jesus begins a journey with his disciples. And like them, we too, begin a journey.

Our journey is to find a new rector for Christ Church Valdosta. Every significant loss leads to a period of grief. I know that many of you are saddened. Me too. However. Let us consider this to be yet another instance of God leading us in new directions. And sometimes, we just simply have to trust in God’s grace to do that. Our goal is to successfully reach the other side of the journey, that is, the successful call of your next rector. How long will that take? Will it be a journey with calm seas and a clearly defined coastline ahead? Or might there be some wind that kicks up, maybe a storm or two of some kind ahead?

Before getting any more anxious than we might already be, we can take comfort in today’s Gospel. Jesus needs some down time; he

exhausted because he has been dealing with crowds who beg for his healing. They look to him for what he brings: new life.

Jesus and his disciples set out in the early evening and Jesus lays down to catch some sleep. Soon thereafter, the wind picks up. It is dark. Thunder and lightning. The waves get nasty and soon they fear for their very lives. In their panic, they wake Jesus. “Teacher: Do you not care that we are perishing?” As soon as he wakes up, Jesus immediately exorcises the storm. “Peace. Be still.” These are the same words that Jesus used in an earlier chapter to heal a man possessed by a demon. And immediately, the storm is calmed. Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them where was your faith? Faith, here, is more than just what one believes. It is the ability to take appropriate actions when confronted with chaos.

Because of the storm and winds, their boat is blown off course and they arrive on the eastern shore in the area known as the Decapolis. And there, for me, is one of the most memorable pieces of biblical literature. It is haunting. In darkness, they land in a cemetery where among the tombs lives a crazed man possessed by demons. He is smashing himself

with stones and was bound with chains and fetters to restrain him. In the religious culture of the day he is ritually unclean and therefore shunned. He is alone except for the legion of demons that possess his body and mind. A Roman Legion, by the way, which is the reference here, was composed of 6000 men. The stage is set and the challenge defined. Is there anyone, any power, that can possibly heal such monstrous evil?

It may seem odd that the demons immediately recognize Jesus addressing him as the “Son of the Most High God.” This is done to contrast the lack of recognition by the disciples and their inability to know Jesus for exactly who he is. They still doubt. Jesus now exorcises the demoniac and this exorcism fully demonstrates his identity. Not only that; it reveals his love for one who was rejected by all others. In this Gospel: Storms without. Storms within. AND THEN JESUS REVEALED!

Jesus and his disciples journeyed into the unknown and never once did they turn back. Had they not ventured forward, there would have been no risk. But more importantly, there would have been no growth.

Recall the story's end. All that was to be feared, all that was demonic, was vanquished and replaced with new life.

Good people of Christ Church. Remember Jesus' words: "Peace be with you." With those words as our guide, we can deal with any storm along the way. Because in the midst of whatever trial, there will be Jesus. **Now please: Let me be very clear at this juncture.** I am not suggesting that your search committee will meet a lunatic somewhere along the way! ***NO WAY! You have enough of a lunatic right in front of your eyes now!*** But please remember this. When Jesus met the one who no one else wanted to be around, Jesus did not reject him; he did not retreat from him; he did not diagnose him or hate him; nor did he fear him. Jesus saw the loving person within! Sometimes what is least expected is where we are led and for some reason. So, let us be open to all that God might have in store ... wherever it leads. Because there we will find new life.

Being human means that we are vulnerable. What lies ahead may to some, feel overwhelming. But look at us. We are the baptized. We've been through the waters of baptism and we have been made stronger

over the years with whatever storms we have weathered. And now we gather around the Holy Table for the meal of Christ's presence where we will be made stronger for the journey.

Allow me to close by leaving with you two images. To accomplish that, please, gently, close your eyes for just a few seconds, please.

**Image one**. On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them: "Let us go across to the other side."

**Image two**. On that distant shore, everyone experienced the new life that only Jesus could bring them. And *everyone was amazed*.

Amen.