

19th Sunday 2017

I'm Sinking! I'm Syncing! Sinking, Syncing. Two words that sound alike but whose meanings are dramatically different. Sinking/ Syncing. These are two human experiences that could not be more different from each other. Can these two words shed some light on our scriptures today and can these scriptures actually shed some light on our human experience?

Before the prophet Elijah find himself in the cave buffeted by the forces of nature; ie. Earthquake, storms, fire, he was being pursued by Jezabel's armies who had the order to kill him. Fleeing for his life he is sinking into depression and despair. He no longer has the desire to live. But God sends an angel to feed him and give him strength for the journey as he sits under the broom tree. (For many years, I would use this passage in a scripture and movement class and ask the students how they would express the relationship between Elijah and the Angel. One of the most creative was one dancer beginning as the tree who morphs into the angel, giving Elijah the nourishment he needs to begin again. Another was one of the dancers riding on the back of the other as Elijah flees for his life. Elijah is unaware of the divine presence who is with him all the time.)

So that's the sinking, sinking into depression and despair but the passage we heard is about syncing. As Elijah realizes that God is not manifest in the forces of nature. God is certainly not in the "fire and the fury". God is in sync with the "still, small voice, the whisper, the soundless sound". And Elijah covers his face with his cloak. The divine presence leaves him speechless, awestruck, aware of his Smallness before the divine mystery.

Sinking/ Syncing. Unlike Elijah who is sinking into depression and despair, Peter is literally sinking. His bravado as he comes to Jesus across the waters fails him. He is not superhuman. He can not defy the laws of nature and he begins to sink in the abyss. But then there is the hand/arm of Jesus rescuing him, pulling him up from the waters that will consume him. Syncing with Jesus? If there's anyone who's out of sync with Jesus it's

Peter. But because Jesus is in sync with all the elements of nature “even the wind and sea obey him”, he is there for Peter.

If by now you have a sinking feeling that I’m overusing sink and sync, I understand. I’m just returning from my annual retreat on the ocean at Gloucester. This retreat house on the Atlantic has been my Elijah’s cave for almost 40 years. (Yes, Elijah fled for 40 days and forty nights) For me and for many it’s a privileged place of encounter with the divine. Because the retreat is in silence, every sound of nature is magnified. The sound of the wind, the crashing of waves on beach or rock, the song of the bird, all these sounds of nature reveal something of the divine. They are not the divine but they are Divine. This past week there were no storms of nature. In fact the ocean was tranquil, calm. But I have been there when the fury of nature was unleashed and it was terrifying. I have been there when my own inner storms were raging and I thought I was drowning, sinking into the abyss of depression and despair like Elijah, drowning in self- doubt like Peter. But as always, there was the Syncing. The feeling of Jesus’ strong arm pulling me up and out of the waters and being in SYNC with the trinity of Love, our creator, the Holy One of Israel. And all I could do is whisper Te Deum: You God.

O God, I love thee, I love thee —
Not out of hope of heaven for me
Nor fearing not to love and be
In the everlasting burning.
Thou, thou, my Jesus, after me
Didst reach thine arms out dying,
For my sake sufferedst nails and lance,□□
Mocked and marred countenance,
Sorrows passing number,
Sweat and care and cumber,
Yea and death, and this for me,
And thou couldst see me sinning:
Then I, why should not I love thee,
Jesu so much in love with me?
Not for heaven's sake; not to be
Out of hell by loving thee;

Not for any gains I see;
But just the way that thou didst me
I do love and I will love thee:
What must I love thee, Lord, for then? —
For being my king and God. Amen.

Sinking/ Syncing Today there is an invitation to reflect on who God is and how God is for you. Today we have an invitation to remember the times when we have been sinking, overwhelmed by forces beyond our control and affirm our belief that God is that still, small voice that says, I am with you. God is that strong arm that reaches out to lift us up.