

What is Doug Doing?

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time-Matthew 14: 22-33- August 13, 2017

In the summers of my teenage life, I took three different trips to the Boundary Waters of Northern Minnesota and Canada. The five-day excursion into the pristine wilderness was an experience of breathtaking beauty and hard work for the Explorer Scout troop that consisted of about 35 teenagers (boys and girls) and our adult leaders. It was a wonderful time of exploration in which we were challenged to work together, live together and get along with a number of different and very unique personalities while canoeing and portaging approximately 60 miles over the five-day adventure. It was physically demanding and psychologically stimulating to work so hard on vacation.

On one particular day, the troop was canoeing across a very large lake. The leaders divided us up into three groups to make this journey. We were to meet on the other side of the lake while keeping track of those in our group and working together against a pretty strong head wind. About half way across this large lake we heard the group ahead of us yelling. We looked ahead to see what appeared to be one of the boys standing on the water. Literally, it looked like Doug was out in the middle of the lake with no canoes around him. It appeared that he was "walking on water." What Doug is doing was our query into this rather strange illusion.

Of course the truth was that his group had discovered an outcropping of rock that was just about an inch below the surface of the lake. Doug decided it would be great fun to reenact Jesus walking on water for the entire group. We all had a great laugh, took lots of pictures and are still telling the story some 40 years later. The truth about the entire incident was that for a short time we all wondered what Doug was doing and how he was achieving what seemed to be a miraculous feat.

In today's gospel Jesus sends the apostles out across the lake in a boat while he heads up the mountain to pray. The disciples encounter a very difficult situation in which a storm arises and their lives are in danger. The evangelist, Matthew, has set this scene after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in an attempt to reinforce for this audience (and now us) that Jesus is the one who is able to provide the Divine grace to accomplish the miraculous.

Tossed about at sea, the boat (symbolic of The Church) is in danger of self-destructive behavior. Jesus is reinforcing that He is the one who gives us the ability to respond to the storms of life. It is Christ who responds to our lack of faith giving us the grace to persevere during difficult situations and in times of great conflict and challenge. It is Christ who is head of the Church.

Peter's attempt to walk on water is much more than my friend Doug's adolescent joke. Peter believes he can follow the Lord out into the eye of the storm. However, Peter's fear takes over and he begins to sink. **"Immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter, and said to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"** This particular story ends with the disciples proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God, doing him homage.

I learned many valuable lessons on my trips through the Boundary Waters which included the need for hard work, collaboration, teamwork and care for those with whom we work and play. The Church is very much this same structure. We have a responsibility to declare for everyone that Jesus Christ is Lord. We need to care for each other, working together. Asking "What is Doug doing?" should really be a question for each of us. What am I doing? Am I just fooling around in the middle of my life? Am I standing on the solid foundation of Christ? What am I doing to promote the gospel and bring others to Christ? Doug had a natural occurring stage to display his antics. We have Christ, the perfect gift that helps us accomplish miraculous things. No joke!

Blessings!

Sue Schettler