

Text: Matthew 14: 22-33  
Title: *EGO EIMI*  
Date: 08.10.08  
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I went to see “The Dark Knight” with measure of fear and dollop of trepidation. I knew it would be murky, grim, violent, and unsettling.... So, to prime the bat-pump I first watched “Batman Begins” and then on opening weekend settled into a seat in the last row of a crowded theater buffered by popcorn and a cold drink. The movie didn’t disappoint. It was a full throttle assault on the senses ~ I’d like to see it again in I-max.

That was a few weeks ago and since then the plot has faded, the stunts and chase scenes have slipped away, and most of the cast and characters have been forgotten, except for the Joker. He’s stayed with me. For, under stringy dirty green hair and cracked chalky face paint, with sloppy smeared red lips and a delicious crazy whisper, behind darting eyes and yellowed teeth, lurked chaos.

“The Dark Knight” is a classic comic book superhero battle between good and evil, the forces of darkness and the forces of light. It is a mythic struggle between order and chaos. And, while Batman struggles with dark impulses of his own and wrestles with what evil must be wrought in order to defeat evil ~

there is no waver or shadow in the Joker,  
there is no ulterior motive,  
there is no sympathetic back story.  
He is anarchy for the sake of anarchy.  
He is the embodiment of evil.  
Order and goodness be damned; he is an agent of chaos.

The Joker is a character that you don’t quickly shake ~ maybe because he taps into our fear of something disrupting our sense of order or security. We fear something breaking in, or breaking down, or breaking through, and dislodging the grip we have on things. We fear chaos.

We fear the random chaos of terrorist attack.  
We fear the invasive chaos of cancer.  
We fear the tottering chaos of financial collapse.  
We fear the slow chaos of loss.  
We fear the cultural chaos of the immigrant.  
We fear the eroding chaos of addiction.  
We fear the intimate chaos of a broken relationship.  
We fear the senseless chaos of gun violence on our streets.  
We fear the inevitable chaos of change.

That litany may simplify or trivialize our stories and our fears. I hope not. All of our lives are a mix of courage and fear, resolve and worry. And, we try to seal ourselves off from chaos, to keep it at a distance, to keep it suppressed, to keep it manageable ~ but we fear it will come storming through.

As Cynthia Jarvis writes,

*There is so much that we fear over the course of a lifetime, so much we suppose will defeat us, that we make life an exercise in securing ourselves against our insecurities.*

Dear friends what chaos do you fear this morning?  
What expression of chaos lurks below the surface or hides in the shadows?  
What chaos has broken through in your story?

Well, consider this odd little story of Jesus walking on the water. There are some knotty logistical and textual problems with this story and its parallel stories tucked in two other gospels, but different writers write with different intentions and..... and this is one way to read Matthew's slant:

Jesus has just healed the sick and fed the five thousand with a few loaves and a couple fish. And, maybe fearing the king-making machinations of the masses, he disperses the crowd, sends his disciples off in the boat, and heads up the mountain to pray. Then between three and six in the morning Jesus catches up with his disciples by walking out onto the lake where they're fighting a stormy head wind.

It's been a long night. The disciples see Jesus walking on wavy-wind-whipped-water, and maybe because they believed the sea to be the abode of demonic forces and a place where chaos reigns, they think him a ghost-spirit risen up out of the deep darkness.

But, Jesus calls out: "Don't be afraid. *Ego Eimi*"

*Ego Eimi* could be translated, "It is I."

But, *Ego Eimi* translated literally would be rendered, "I am."

And, any Jewish reader ~ remember Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospels, written for a Jewish audience ~ would hear the echoes of God saying to Moses, "I am who I am."

So, it is no wonder that irrepressible Peter is quick to jump overboard to run across the water to Jesus. The Creator God, I AM, the God even over the chaos, was calling. But, he sinks like a rock and again with an echo of Moses stretching his hands out over the water, Jesus snags Peter before he drowns, stills the waters, and climbs into the boat.

Now, that story has been spun through the metaphorical Mixmaster of the church for ages.

For some the water was seen as an experience of persecution, Peter was seen as the church, and the encouragement was for the church to keep her eyes on Christ while going through persecution. So, the story served as a pep talk. "Buck up, be of good cheer, and have faith. Don't let doubt detour you in the face of struggle, keep the faith."

For some the boat represented the church and the water represented baptism and while we are dunked into death with Jesus, he lifts us up soaking wet to new life and salvation's security. Jesus reaches out to you through the waters of baptism and brings you into the saving boat.....church.

And for some the story is a spiritual self-help metaphor. The water represents the challenges and turmoil that we face in this world, but we are called to step out in faith. You can't walk on water unless you get out of the boat.

So, walk with courage and conviction without the crisscrossing double-mindedness of doubt that causes us to sink; walk without the fears that pull us down; walk without looking at the winds and waves. Claim victory over the stormy waters of this life through faith in Jesus....

*Oh, and if we falter it's our fault, because our faith was too small.*

Or, listen to these words from a sermon by Saint Augustine:

*Well, my brethren, my sermon must be ended. Consider the world to be the sea; the wind is boisterous, and there is a mighty tempest. Each man's peculiar lust is his tempest. Thou dost love God; thou walkest upon the sea, and under thy feet is the swelling of the world. Thou dost love the world, it will swallow thee up. Its skill is only to devour its lovers, not to carry them. But when thy heart is tossed about by lust, in order that thou mayest get the better of thy lust, call upon the Divinity of Christ...*

Now, I am sure that all of those interpretations have their place, but....

But, what if the heart of the story is not the drama of walking on the water?

What if the soul of the story is not the stilling of the storm?

What if the meaning is not in the metaphorical mix?

What if the climax of this story is the confession?

In the face of chaos, tossed about on the waters, buffeted by winds, soaked from sinking into the drink, maybe chided with a chuckle for being short on faith, Peter climbs in the boat and with the others gives voice to one of the first confessions of the Christian church.

*Truly you are the Son of God.*

You are *Ego Eimi*.

You are I AM

You are Lord of all creation ~ even Lord over the chaos of the churning deep.

Dear friends, Peter is not saved by his faith – he is saved by I AM

Peter is not drowned by his doubt – he is saved by I AM.

Whether he sinks or swims as metaphor or miracle – he is saved by I AM.

So, Peter and his partners respond with an act of confession:

*Truly you are the Son of God.*

Now everybody goes through storms in this life. It is naïve to suggest that chaos won't come our way or that we are somehow particularly sheltered from bad winds, dark nights, and troubled waters. We are not somehow specially insulated, isolated, or insured. And it is not just something outside of us; sometimes the chaos is in us. Sometimes it feels like chaos can hold sway in this world and in our lives....

But, no matter what your storm, I hope this morning you are particularly encouraged by Brian's profession of faith. Twenty one years ago at 3 pounds and 3 ounces he was born with spastic Cerebral Palsy, and with the tools of automated chair and computer he offers this confession of faith. It reads like a contemporary Psalm. I am hard pressed to think of a more beautiful or profound statement.

In his words:

*The Lord has been with me for all my years.  
I believe that He has helped me through many tough times.  
I believe that He will continue to assist me in climbing the mountain of life.  
I am very grateful for so many things that the Lord has done for me.  
I feel that Lord has been part of the decisions of my life.  
I feel that without the Lord my life would be very different.  
The Lord has put so many good people into my life.  
The Lord will continue to help me through the difficult times that occur in my life.  
The Lord is my Savior*

Thank you Brian.

I am not sure that it is said any better, but the prophet Isaiah put it this way, and maybe the disciples would have heard this echo as well:

*But now, this is what the Lord says ~  
he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.  
And when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you. When you  
walk through the fire you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.  
For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

Dear friends, come hell or high water,  
you and I are not saved by the size of our faith,  
and we're not drowned by the depth of our doubt,  
we are saved by I AM.

And so, in the face of whatever the world churns up, no matter what storm you are weathering, we gather to remember and confess. We don't have control we have a confession. We are a confessing church. Against the chaos:

We confess Christ to be Lord of the wind and waves.

We confess Christ to have the final word over against the chaos of the deep.

We confess Christ to have been born into the chaos of creation for our sake.

We confess Christ to have grabbed us from the drink.

We confess Christ to be the Son of God.

Amen.