

The readings for August 13, 2017:

1 Kings 19:9-18

Psalm 85:8-13

I will listen to what the LORD God is saying. (Ps. 85:8)

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

This week's Gospel reading reinforces the themes we found in last week's lesson. The disciples are in the boat and Jesus walks across the water to them. They don't recognize him; indeed, they're terrified. When they realize who it is, Peter, always enthusiastic, asks Jesus to bid him to come, which he does. Peter walks across the water with no problem, until he realizes what he's doing and starts to sink.

Now, most of us probably haven't had experiences where we've suspended the laws of nature, but most of us can probably relate to what Peter experiences. When I first learned to type, I got to the point where I could type at a very fast speed—until I thought about what I was doing. If I just let my fingers go and didn't look at them, if I did what I knew I could do, I'd be fine. I've had similar experiences in learning foreign languages and in learning to play the mandolin; if I play the notes without double checking both my fingers and the chord charts and music books, I find out that I really can play—still more haltingly than I would like, alas.

This story is also about God's presence and our inability to recognize the Divine all around us, as well as our trouble accepting the miraculous. One of the narrative arcs the Bible is God's desire to be with God's creation, to know everybody, to be fully present in our day-to-day lives--to the extent of becoming human. And God has to go to great lengths to get our attention—bushes burst into flame, oppressive governments release the captives, loaves and fishes feed thousands, people rise from the dead, God goes so far as to take on human form—miracle after miracle, and still humans don't understand and don't want to accept God's daily presence.

Even when we do let ourselves glimpse the sacred and divine, even when we experience the miraculous, how quickly we forget and let the mundane swamp us. Psychologists would probably tell us that our approach is a coping mechanism, that if we let ourselves be that open to God, we'd go insane, or at least we'd look insane to our fellow humans. I'm not sure I agree. Maybe we'd be better witnesses, better disciples.

Be on the lookout for God in your daily life. Maybe it will just be a wink from the Creator, like a tree full of butterflies. Maybe you'll be in the presence of the full-blown miraculous, and all doubts will vanish—the tumor shrinks, the passengers escape the burning plane, the hurricane curves out to sea. Watch for God, listen for God, be alert. God is there, by your side, both during the times of the miraculous as well as the mundane.