The Abundant Life

A sermon preached at St Brendan's Episcopal Parish, Deer Isle, ME, on the 10th Sunday after Pentecost (B), July 28, 2024 by the Rev. Dr. Jenny Reece

Texts: : Second Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145; Letter to the Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

Prayer:

Holy God, God of abundant goodness and unconquerable love, we give you thanks that you gather us today around your word, to be fed with it until we are full of your hope, full of your spirit. Feed us with your peace; feed us, we pray, so that we may feed others, not hoarding what we have out of fear of want, but being generous in all things, knowing how love abounding flows to us from you without stint forever. And so may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be blessed by you who are "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to whom be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus", now and forever, Amen.

So here we are in the rocking boat amidst stormy waters, and here comes Jesus walking on the water towards us, his disciples and followers, saying: *Do not be afraid, it is I.*

Do not be afraid.

We need to hear those words today don't we? Because just at this time in our lives and in our lives of our communities our nation and our world, there seems to be so much to be afraid of, and so many people intent, it seems, on whipping up those fears into a frenzy of constant stress and anxiety. But a people who live in terror are a people susceptible to manipulation and control. The devil wants us to be fearful.

And so, in the midst of this tempest of fears, here is Jesus: *It is I. Do not be afraid.*

It is I. Ego eimi, is the Greek. And yes it means simply. "I am here. It's ok. It's me. You know me. I'm the one who has called you-- taught you-- nurtured you-- fed you. You've seen and known my power. Here I am with all of that for you. With you. Beside you."

But who are you, Jesus?

Ego Eimi is so much more that "Hi I'm here". In saying it, Jesus-- and John the gospel writer-- is reminding the listener of the story of how the God of power and glory, the God of Abraham and Isaac, revealed a Name to Moses in the burning bush. God revealed this Name to Moses so that he would have the power to liberate the people—and did it like this: The voice from the burning bush said "Moses, when they ask you Who is the God who sent you, tell them I AM sent you." The four-lettered Hebrew name is YahWeh (transcribed as Jehovah in old translations)and means, simply: I am. Or, I am who I am, Or, I am who I am becoming

The *Ego Eimi* of Jesus refers directly back to Moses. But this is not the first time in this story, this two-stories in one—that Moses is remembered.

Everything in the story about the feeding in the wilderness—one of the only stories about Jesus that occurs in all four gospels, by the way—bears witness to Jesus as a new Moses, a new prophet. Not only Moses is evoked but other prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha. John in his telling of the story makes explicit reference to the story of Elisha in 2nd kings that we listened to as our first reading today.

But the portrayal of Jesus in this story is not only as a prophet in the tradition of the Prophets, but also as the new Moses, the new Law giver. It's unmistakable, beginning really somewhat before today's selection of text begins, at the end of John's Chapter 5: if we had read this we would have heard Jesus complaining that his opponents did not understand or believe what Moses had written

(John 5:39-47). Immediately then we are launched into a scene that takes place at Passover: the festival uniquely concerned with the liberation of the people from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. So many parts of the story we heard today hearken back to that great, formative story:

- The Leading people through a wilderness—for 40 years then, now for just a day
- The miraculous feeding of the people—— there with mysterious heavenly manna; here with the barley loaves and "sardines" (that's my favorite translation of the "little fish" Barley and Sardines were definitely the food of the poor in Jesus' day, by the way)
- The testing of the people—then, the test was whether or not they would they obey the rules about gathering the manna,(they did not) and whether or not they would trust God to provide all that they might need? (It was hard for them to do so, as it is for us). In this story, the disciples are particularly singled out for a test: Jesus knows what he is doing, he knows there will be enough. But do they trust him? The disciples, alas, fail the test. Both Philip and Andrew can only focus on scarcity—*we don't have enough money to buy food for all these people*, says one; *how can this poor boy's lunch be enough for everyone?* Says the other. They don't trust in the abundance of grace offered by God in Jesus Christ. Do we?
- In another reference Jesus commands that the pieces be gathered up so that nothing is wasted, just as Moses commanded in Exodus 16:19, and is repeated in the story of Elisha that we heard.
- And John tells us (in disctinction to the other gospel writers) that Jesus goes up "to the mountain" (not simply "a" mountain in verse 3). And then, after the feeding, Jesus again withdraws "to *the* mountain" (verse 15). Perhaps John repeatedly mentions "the mountain" to bring to our recollection that other mountain in Israel's story, the mountain where Moses met God.
- But after the mountain top experiences, the people still grumble (verse 41), just as Israel did in the wilderness (Exodus 16:2).

- Finally, God gave Moses the power to part the waters of the Red Sea so that the people could cross on dry land—an amazing miracle. But John shows us Jesus is even more powerful. He does not merely part the water. He walks right on top of those seething, rolling waves. Yes, here comes Jesus the New Moses, walking towards us on top of all the fearful water.

In all these ways Jesus is seen to be for sure "the prophet who is to come again into the world" as the people themselves claim and witness. But they misunderstand this too, wanting immediately to make him king—to *force* him to be king. Isn't that so human? Down to this day there's something in us that longs to have our solutions made for us by an authority, and authoritarian kingly rule in troubled times seems almost desirable. Some wanted to make George Washington King too.

But Jesus knows, this is never a good solution. And His kingship, as he makes clear in his Passion, when he is hauled before Pilate, is not of this world. His authority is not authoritarian. It is the authority of abundant love.

The power displayed in this miraculous feeding is nothing less than the power of the presence of God, fully human, fully capable of being human, in all of its glory, in Jesus. Fully equipped to give us everything we need, and then some.

Ego Eimi says Jesus, walking on the water towards us. *I am who I am.* The name of God is a name so holy and powerful the Jews cannot pronounce the four letters that spell it in the Hebrew: instead of saying *Yahweh* they say *Adonai*, the Lord. But Jesus can say it in Greek, and does: *Ego Eimi*. At other places in John's Gospel Jesus says it again, in different, longer forms—"I am the living water—I am the bread of heaven—I am the vine, you are the branches, I am the resurrection and the life." But here it is plain and stark. Coming impossibly across the water, Jesus says. *Do not be afraid. Here I am.* God himself, in all God's holy power, is with you, in with me, in every storm. Is with St Brendan in his coracle and with the Breton fisherfolk who prayed, *"Dear Lord, be good to*

me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small." Is with us in our stormy sea of politics and violence and climate change.

Jesus is walking on the water, even as it rises. Water is the stuff of creation. Water is precious. Over it the spirit of the God brooded and formed from it all of life as we are told in Genesis. We come from water, we are water, we return to water as much as to dust. The first thing we ask when we find a new planet, *is there water there*? Water is the sign of life. All our civilizations grew up by rivers. Out of the water of Baptism we rise with new life, forgiven of sin, and one with Jesus Christ (Paul Romans 6:4)

If we are one with Christ then through the water of our baptism, can we too not walk on the water?

Now I don't want to read in the newspaper next week that twenty people drowned trying to walk on water in Eggemoggin Reach! Don't try this at home!

You know what I mean—the walking of water by Jesus was a sign, not a call to try it ourselves. But a sign that we too can walk across the waves of fear that sweep across lives and our culture, and not be overwhelmed. Yes, it is all right, and natural, to feel afraid, and should never ignore how scary things really are for us and for our neighbors. But let us never let our eyes lose sight of the shore, or of the boat where our friends are, while we let those waves slosh about under us. Meanwhile, while we walk forward on top of them with all the power of God, walking with confidence into the world of abundance where kindness, peace, gentleness and humility rule and all are free. Only by giving up the hegemony of fear in our lives can we walk into the abundant life which is the life with God. The stories of Moses, the stories of Jesus, are about the abundant, overflowing goodness of God that feeds us to fullness and has so many leftovers that we too can be generous in sharing with others all the hope and kindness and love that we have.

Fear not. I am here. Says Jesus, walking across the water to us. Let's let him in.
Amen.