

Ordinary 12 24th June 2018

Readings:

2Cor.6:1-13

Mark 4:35-41

Reflection

When have you been willing to 'cross over to the other side' with Jesus? What has that 'crossing over' entailed?

For the first disciples their crossing over with Jesus (in today's gospel story) was from the familiar home shores of Galilee, and into unfamiliar *Gentile* territory 'where there were pigs and howling demons' (as one commentator states). It started out just fine. The evening had come, Jesus needed rest, and the disciples took him in the boat – just as he was, leaving the crowds behind. And there were other boats with him. They were not alone. But the storm that arose on the windswept sea during their journey caused great panic amongst the disciples. The boat was being swamped and they feared for their lives.

So often, in our own lives, it is the unknown journey that triggers our doubts & fears, throws us into chaos and threatens to overwhelm us - the unknown of new relationships or employment changes, impending retirement, health challenges or the loss of a loved one. In these and other journeys into the unknown, we can feel deeply threatened and very alone with our fears. Our head may tell us that Jesus is with us, that the Holy One of all Love, mercy and compassion is our constant companion; but when the winds of change fill our sails and threaten to sweep us off course – or worse still – to capsize the comfortable coracle we identify as normal life, then... our heart may well cry out to a God who seems to have at best, fallen asleep, or at worst deserted us: *"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

I can relate to that!

But in the past week, our church calendar has marked the lives of five men - each very different - who were *willing* to cross over to the other side *with* Jesus. I briefly share the story of three of them.

The first, Sundar Singh, was born in 1889 to a deeply religious well-to-do Hindu family in the Punjab. Sundar's mother wanted him to become a Sadhu or Holy Man. While attending a Presbyterian Mission school he vehemently opposed Christianity as a western intrusion and burned a copy of the Bible. But Sundar could find no inner peace until in his mid-teens, when he encountered the living Christ in a vision. Although his family tried to dissuade him, he became a Christian and devoted his life to preaching the gospel in India and beyond. Sadhu Sundar's desire was to present Christ in a way that was meaningful to the cultures of the east. He was recognized as a modern saint and mystic, and was known for the serenity and radiance of his appearance. Keen to make what was to be a third journey to Tibet, he set out in April 1929 but was never heard of again.

The next 'saint of the week' was Henare Wiremu Taratoa of Te Ranga, born about 1830, who was a pupil of missionary Henry Williams in the Bay of Islands (and from whom he took his name). Henare also accompanied Bishop Selwyn on several journeys including a voyage to Melanesia. He is remembered for the compassion he advocated towards his opponents during the attack on Gate Pa by British troops during 1864. He drafted Orders of the Day for the Maori forces – a code of conduct for battle - advocating care for the injured and confining conflict to participants only. These orders were prefaced by a prayer and concluded with Romans 12:20 *'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink'*

This code of conduct was conveyed to the British commander by Taratoa at the request of his chief. Later, in June 1864, British troops regrouped and again attacked Te Ranga. After the battle, Henare's body was found, together with a copy of the Orders of the Day.

The third saint of the week was Alban, the earliest British Christian known to us by name and martyred for the faith. Alban was beheaded in the year 304 on the orders of the Roman governor of Verulamium during the persecution ordered by the Emperor Diocletian. The somewhat gruesome story is as follows: A Christian priest, fleeing for safety, came to Alban's house in present-day St Albans. Alban gave him shelter over several weeks, and was so struck by the beauty of the religion the fugitive professed, that he himself was converted to the Christian faith.

When the officers of the Roman army came to Alban's house searching for the priest, Alban exchanged garments with the priest and sent him away to safety, allowing himself to be arrested instead. When the governor heard what had happened and discovered that Alban also had become a Christian and that he refused to renounce his faith, he ordered him to be flogged and tortured. When he realised that Alban had no intention of renouncing his new faith, the governor sentenced him to be executed. Alban was beheaded near where St Alban's Cathedral now stands.

While we, as 21st century Christians, may not be called to make fatal pilgrimages, face persecution, torture or death at the hands of an enemy, Jesus does continue to invite us to cross over to the other side with him – to live our lives fully, journeying into the unknown and trusting in his constant presence.

Today's world is full of uncertainty, storm and chaos – conflict, climate change, natural disaster, over-population, diminishing resources. And we are called to 'cross over to the other side' with Jesus – to live lives of attentiveness, prayer and responsible action. But the story of Jesus stilling the storm reminds me to 'Keep Calm and Carry On' in the midst of uncertainty. It invites me to examine where *my* fears arise from and assures me that more often than not, the current *personal* reality is manageable and my stormy fears are overblown. The image

of Jesus in the stern of the boat, asleep on a cushion, encourages me to take rest – even in times of seeming chaos.

A very memorable experience that sticks with me, is the night of February 22nd 2011. An anxious group of parishioners, neighbours and community folk were settling down in sleeping bags and rugs on the carpeted floor of the church hall in Linwood. Strong after-shocks continued to rattle windows and nerves.

Adrenalin surges ensured that most of us remained awake, even though we were exhausted. One local family huddled together, their caged cat meowing pitifully. But the baby – oblivious to all the chaos and uncertainty - lay sleeping in her mother's arms. The steady, relaxed breathing of that little one was the Christ-presence to me that night. She was the calm in my storm. I was able, in her near presence, to let go and place myself in the arms of God.

How has Jesus stilled your fears? Be assured..... he *is* in your boat!