

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place three unlighted candles and an open bible at the center of your group.

LEADER: (*lights first candle*)

I light this candle in the name of the great I Am, who first separated light from darkness and breathed life into us.

ALL: *In the name of God who gives us light and life.*

LEADER: (*lights second candle*)

I light this candle in the name of Jesus, who gives us the light of his life to follow.

ALL: *In the name of Jesus who gives light to our lives.*

LEADER: (*lights third candle*)

I light a candle in the name of the Spirit, who moves our being and inflames us with yearning.

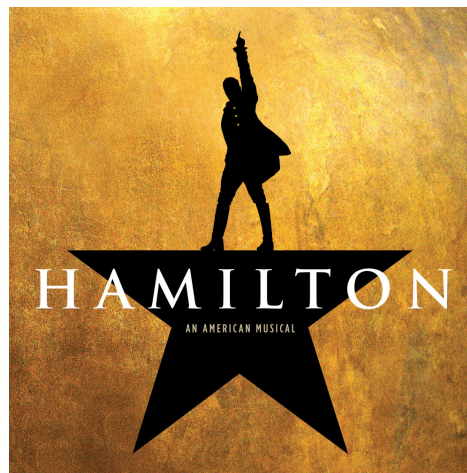
ALL: *In the name of the Spirit who fires our moving on. Blessed be God's name, the Trinity who holds us in love.*

Sunday's gospel is the first story in a long cycle of oral tradition. The cycle begins and ends with Jesus' disciples together in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. A storm threatens to swamp them in Sunday's story. A strong wind keeps them from getting to shore in the last. A boat full of Jesus' disciples is a ready symbol for the infant church of the first decades after Jesus' death and resurrection.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

The musical "Hamilton" ends with Alexander's death in a duel with Aaron Burr. His wife Eliza Skylar, who lived another 50 years, sings a final song, its repeated words, "Who lives? Who dies? Who tells your story?" Eliza tells Alexander's story by not only telling his story but living it, helping plan the Washington Monument, founding an orphanage, speaking out against slavery.



Jesus preached, healed, cast out unclean spirits, and forgave sins in his public ministry in Galilee. He called together a band of twelve men and of women who followed and served him and accompanied him to Jerusalem. In the previous chapter Jesus taught the disciples the parable of the sower and answered their questions.

Jesus is the person in the gospel who lives, who dies, who is raised up to new life. He doesn't tell his story; his eyewitness disciples do. They who heard his teachings and witnessed his healing and forgiving actions become the proclaimers of his good news. They gather in house churches, to break bread and tell his story. They live his teachings, and his story becomes their story, too.

At Jesus' request the disciples are heading for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The people there are Gentiles. The destination hints the role of Jesus' followers to bring his good news to the nations.

Jesus sleeps in the boat as waves roll over the sides. How is Jesus present in the storms these first Christians face? In the nine stories in this oral cycle the eyewitnesses tell us Jesus' story and invite us to faith like their own.

Today in our city we worry about storms as we await the jury's verdict on the police action that killed George Floyd. Some 3,000 National Guards are on duty deployed throughout the cities, including both business centers where we buy groceries.

● **How do you tell Jesus' story?**

GOSPEL

Jesus' disciples fear for their lives.

NARRATOR: As evening came on that day (Jesus had been teaching crowds in parables from a boat just off shore), he said to his disciples—

JESUS: Let us go across to the other side.

NARRATOR: Leaving the crowd behind, his disciples took Jesus with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A terrible windstorm arose, and waves beat into the boat so that it was being swamped. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion; the disciples woke him up.

DISCIPLES: Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?

NARRATOR: Jesus awoke, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea—

JESUS: Peace! Be still!

NARRATOR: Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. Jesus said to his disciples—

JESUS: Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?

NARRATOR: They were filled with great awe and said to one another—

DISCIPLES: Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Mark 4:35-41



For Mark, fear is the threshold of faith.

In this passage Jesus raises two questions important to the whole of Mark's gospel: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Perhaps Jesus should have asked, "What makes you think I'm asleep on the job?"

These questions suggest where the audience is at for whom Mark writes in AD 70. This audience faces a turning point. The Roman siege to put down the Jewish rebellion has scattered the Christian community in Jerusalem. Many have fled to Galilee. The destruction of the temple has

left these Christian Jews no place to return to the religious practice of the past. Fear seems to prevent them from experiencing the power of faith in Jesus, from going ashore in a new time and place.

Jesus' questions imply our whole life journeys as Christians. How do we move from fear to faith or from doubt to faith? How do we navigate the stormy seas of our times and travel from one shore to another?

Mark wants his hearers to recognize that they are where

Jesus' disciples were at the beginning of their ministry—afraid, amazed, often confused. For Mark fear and awe are thresholds where faith and commitment begin.

● What shore has your community of faith left? Toward what shore are you headed?

● When if ever has fear been a threshold of faith for you?

Mark is the first to write a gospel. His narrative is closest to oral tradition. To write the first gospel, Mark gathers oral traditions about Jesus that Christian communities have heard from his eyewitness disciples. These communities continue to tell and shape the traditions as they gather in Jesus' name and break bread together as he asked.

By becoming an author, Mark creates a written narrative that travels though time and space beyond the lifetimes of Jesus' eyewitness disciples and the Christian communities they founded. It travels not only to the late first-century audience for whom Mark writes but to us 2,000 years later. Sunday's sea-crossing is a story to which Christians of every generation can relate.

A boat transports many people together. A boat full of disciples gives us an image of Church, of Christian believers traveling the seas of time and facing storms that raise our fears and call us to faith.

● What storms threaten us today that Christians have not faced in the past?

● How do you experience Jesus in the Church today—awake or asleep?

● How necessary is chaos to renewal?

How people move from their fears to faith in Jesus concerns Mark. To provide role models, Mark consistently characterizes Jesus' disciples that we know in their early confused, bewildered, often anxious experience of Jesus. We get to know Peter, Andrew, James, John, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome in their pre-resurrection understanding of Jesus. Mark wants his audience to know that these disciples who became leaders in the Christian community once felt as fearful and apprehensive as they do.

Sunday's gospel creates a typical threshold for hearers to come to faith. The disciples in the boat are afraid for their lives. They awaken Jesus, asking, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus calms the sea and asks why they are afraid, why they have no faith.

Jesus' calming action and chastening questions fill the disciples with awe. They move from one kind of fear to another—from fear for their lives to awe. Mark suspends the story with the disciples expressing their awe in a question, "Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?"

This rhetorical question in the narrative creates a threshold for the hearers of the gospel. We can answer the question. Mark writes for us. Like the disciples in the boat we can move from fear to awe to faith. Awe is a gift of the Spirit. Awe is the beginning of wisdom, a threshold of faith according to the Old Testament Wisdom books.

● When have you experienced a shift from fear to awe?

● How have your experiences of awe affected your faith?

Many fear so much change. For some the symbols that evoked the awesome mystery of God have vanished—the polyphony, the incense, the Latin.

For many others, the changes help them recognize the holy in their everyday work and family relationships. They lector, sing, serve the poor and sick, teach, build, work for justice. But this rising participation of the people of God in parishes creates tensions in the Church as a hierarchical institution. A new pastor with a new style can undo the work of pastoral committees



Like the generation Mark addresses in AD 70, Catholic Christians today are living through a profound change. From the time of the Council of Trent (1574) until Vatican II (1962-65), the Church stayed remarkably the same, frozen in response to the Reformation.

The contemporary Church has experienced a quantum leap in the past 56 years. Our boat is afloat in a global world, wired and webbed together not only electronically and economically but culturally.

and fundraising efforts, alienating parishioners. And a new pope with a common touch can raise hope up again.

Every Eucharist calls and empowers us anew to be the life-giving body of Christ in the world. Every Eucharist celebrates our hope of communion on earth as in heaven.

● What changes have created new life for your community of faith?

Job questions why he suffers.

Job may be the most contemporary of characters in Israel's scriptures. He is the original good man to whom bad things happen. The story starts in the heavens where God and Satan disagree. Satan maintains Job is a believer in God because he has it so good—a wonderful wife, many children, abundant flocks. God maintains Job is an authentic believer whose faith does not rest on prospering. God and Satan put Job to the test.

Job suffers terribly from the loss of his flocks and his children. His wife thinks he should curse God. Job doesn't curse God but wishes he were dead. When friends hear of his suffering, they come to help him. Their analysis and advice make up most of the chapters between Job 3 and 38.

These friends think Job must have sinned, should admit it, and hope to prosper again. They subscribe to a theology that equates prosperity with keeping the commandments and sees suffering as the result of sin.

Job maintains he has not sinned, that there is no

reason these bad things have happened to him. He asks the great human question—why.

Sunday's first reading is the passage in which God finally answers Job. God speaks out of a awesome, destructive natural phenomenon, a whirlwind. God never gives Job a satisfactory answer but instead says, who are you to ask why? Where were you when I made the world? God calls Job to awe and fear at God's power as the foundation of faith.

God speaks to Job.

**Then the Holy One answered Job out of the whirlwind:
Who shut the sea within doors
when it burst out from the womb?
When I made the clouds
its garments,
and thick darkness
its swaddling band?
When I set limits for it
and fastened the bar of its door,
and said: Thus far shall you come
but no farther,
and here shall your proud waves
be stopped?**

Job 38.1,8-11

- What insights have you come to about why bad things happen to good people?

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DO SOMETHING

- How do or how can faith-based organizations in your area help government work toward the common good?
- What is a way you might mentor one of the next generation of Christians in your parish?

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PRAY

Take two minutes of quiet in your group to identify a way you as a disciple of Jesus have gotten over fear, anger, or paralysis in some small ways recently. Then pray the following passage from Sunday's second reading together (2 Corinthians 5.14-17).

LEADER: The love of Christ impels us who have reached the conviction that since one died for all, all died.

ALL: The old order has passed away. Now all is new.

LEADER: Jesus died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sakes died and was raised up.

ALL: The old order has passed away. Now all is new.

LEADER: Because of this we no longer look on anyone in terms of mere human judgment.

ALL: The old order has passed away. Now all is new.

LEADER: Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

ALL: The old order has passed away. Now all is new.



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