

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
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Back in the 90's my brother Bill and I had a weekly phone call - 9pm every Tuesday. He lived in Florida but the call always followed the 8:00 TV show: *Jag*, which morphed into *NCIS*. I loved the way the characters would say in Navy talk - "*I've got your 6!*" translated for me: ... "*I've got your back!*" Since I was a little girl, Bill who was 5 years older - always had my back...even when I was a pest! As an adult - when I felt overwhelmed - I would call him - and come away - stronger! There was nothing he could do - but the love we shared created the change.

Today's readings will take that human understanding and gift to a whole new level! Let me explain:

Elijah was a prophet and miracle worker who lived in the 9th century BC. He is ranked with Moses in saving their religion from being corrupted by pagan worship that grew from occupying powers of other countries. At the time the King had married a foreign woman named Jezebel whose aim was to stamp out the Jewish worship of Yahweh. She had a sanctuary built to her god Baal in Samaria and her goal was to make life better for those who would worship Baal.... thus putting Yahweh on an equal par with her nature god.

Elijah stood against this and in the 1 Kings - we see through miracles he was proving Yahweh was greater than Baal - which set Jezebel against him. Her threats were horrible and she was determined to kill Elijah. She must have been a powerful woman for Elijah headed into the wilderness alone to escape her. For days he would walk and collapse, worn out and wishing he was dead.... but one night after falling asleep - he was awakened to find food and drink - and strengthened, he walked on to reach Mount Horeb, where in the book of Deuteronomy, is the place Moses received the 10 Commandments.

He is told to stand on the mountain and wait for Yahweh... First a *mighty wind* comes - like a Tornado - but Yahweh wasn't in the wind.... Then - an *Earthquake* - but Yahweh isn't in the Earthquake - Then - a *Fire - hot and blistering*.... but Yahweh wasn't in the fire. Then - QUIET descended - a deep stillness.... Elijah covered his face.... and a voice whispered  
"Elijah - What are you *doing* here?"

Let's set that aside for a moment and look at the Gospel....

WE have heard and seen on TV the many agonizing stories of people who have had to leave their loved ones with the virus - to die alone.... Their loved one lay there - seeing only eyes - feeling no human touch except through layers of gloves.... hearing no familiar voice that

loved them..... as they died. Families are suffering, not just the loss of their mother or father or child - but the pain of not being with them.

So, imagine then - how Jesus is experiencing the same thing. Last Sunday's gospel began with his hearing of the beheading of John the Baptist and how Jesus sought to go off by himself to be alone. The crowds didn't allow that - but in today's gospel, he is at last getting the chance to go up the mountain and pray - and grieve alone. Dying alone with Covid is awful - but to have your cousin - a few months older than you - the one who really gets what you are about - being beheaded!!! for speaking *Truth to Power*?

The reality of loss - the reality of the evil in the world- that would not stop for something called *truth!* It would take the rest of his life for Jesus to absorb and understand what his mission involved and what he and others would face in that mission! Remember - he is human in all ways but sin.

He did pray - and in all the moments that would follow - what he gained in prayer would be his mission to make known to others.... beginning with the sudden storm that was terrifying his disciples in the boat. We know and love this story and people have preached about it over all the centuries before us.... Here at 3am - Jesus walked toward them over the water... in this storm...to the men trying to keep the boat straightened - and being terrified!

Now they were seeing things - no, it's a ghost... and their fear became cries.... Imagine them and the night they have been through.... and now a ghost? They hear Jesus saying:

"Do not worry! - It is I! Don't be Afraid!

Poor Peter has taken a bad rap for being willing to jump out of the boat and walk to Jesus - then suddenly, battered by the wind, he is frightened and ... begins to sink... Terrified, he cries out: "Save Me! ---- "Oh, Little-faith!" Jesus says and reaches out his hand to him. I doubt it was a reprimand but more of an understanding love for Peter's zeal- impulsive or not.

Now comes the deeper lesson - starting with a question: "*Why did you doubt?*"

What a whirlwind of thought and emotion was running through those men! Why doubt???? These weren't neophyte fishermen.... the reason for their fear **was** their experience! They knew well the danger of sudden storms on that lake! I would imagine climbing into the boat, Jesus just let the storm calm and normal action go on for awhile--- letting their minds and hearts absorb the presence of seeing him there with them....But really - can't you just see Jesus - after awhile saying to them:

"Look, you have got to know... ***I've got your back!*** - looking from one to the other - repeating his version of those words. No matter what you go through - you are never alone! I am in it with you! Then they could grasp enough to say - "You are indeed the Firstborn of God!"

But did they really understand that - no, I truly believe, it was a growing, evolving understanding that finally became clear after the Resurrection.

But what about us today? How are we called to grasp that meaning? The Covid virus halted our parish study of the book "*Christ in Crisis*". However, the theme of reclaiming Christ goes on as we look forward to sharing the study again.

I'd like to close pondering this thought with you... Reclaiming Christ could sound like going to the dry cleaners with a ticket and reclaiming an item... but it is very different than that!

God became human in Jesus to clearly show the depth of the humility, love and mercy that IS God and what that means for us individually and as a society! Through the growing realization of that - the disciples - empowered with God's Spirit within them - grew in that humility, love, mercy and non-violence - which slowly permeated their hearts, their words and actions....so that in their face -in their words - in their relationships... they brought forth the Christ Presence..... Christ was reclaimed *IN* them! and then *through* them.

That is how I believe in the Christ Presence.... it is very real - but instead of seeing Jesus - the man; after the Resurrection... the Christ lives through us - the more we *can allow God's Word - God's love - God's mercy to live in us...* Then through *your face - your love - your actions Christ is Present*. To make it even more awesome - our Namaste? *The divine in me greets the divine in you?* The more we are aware of that gift - that purpose in creation - Christ *is* reclaimed and very visible in this world....That Presence of humility, love and mercy will be a Presence that changes things.... that overcomes racism and all the isms - for superiority cannot exist within the Christ presence!

It is through the Christ Presence reclaimed in us that all countries of the world will see the need to work together to overcome the many ways people suffer - and *the need for the common good* will be the bottom line of all governmental decisions!

Let us pray for the grace to allow our own spirit to be open to the growth of that Christ Presence *in us - to realize more than ever....* What Jesus *told those disciples in that boat...*

Don't be Afraid! I've got your back!

As we live out of that Presence - we will face the chaos as Elijah did - going back into it... as Jesus did - all the way to Calvary! As the disciples - of the first century and all the centuries since have faced... but that Presence is stronger than any and all Evil! Love and Mercy will always be the dead end for evil!

That Presence will continually change the world - unite us as one and in that unity - bring forth that Peace we all long for! The only thing we have to remember - in our contemporary language..... **It is God who has our back!**

Amen!