

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2023 A

Think for a moment of a loved one's voice. As distinctive as a face can be in recognizing a person, so a voice we come to know can identify someone without seeing them. When they say: "It's me" we don't need to ask who. When Moses came upon the burning bush in the desert, he did not just see something remarkable. He also heard a Voice: God speaking to him and revealing the divine Name: Yahweh – Hebrew for "I am Who am." When Jesus appears in another very unlikely way – walking on the water in the midst of a storm – the Voice of God also speaks, and uses the same words. Our English translation reads, "It is I"; but the Greek of the New Testament reads *ego eimi* – literally, I AM, the Gospel writer's way to clearly name Jesus as the same God Whom Moses encountered – a Voice that speaks of peace.

COVID gave us some sense of how powerless the people of Elijah's time also felt when confronted with forces of nature and history over which they had no control. Despite progress in science and technology, we can still feel tossed about by the storms of life, of politics, of changing values – not to mention the same powers of disease and wind and storm. But God reveals Himself to Elijah, NOT in quake and fire and tornado – not in mighty powers that overwhelm – but in A TINY WHISPER. The fact that it is a whisper is not just about volume, that whispers are subtle and hard to hear – but more, a whisper implies a Voice, and a Voice implies a PERSON, God Who is there with His mercy in our struggles. It may be hard to hear that quiet Voice amid the noise of our world and our minds, but it is there just the same,.

A few weeks ago, we heard Jesus tell His disciples, "What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." Every human life knows times of darkness, like the storm on the lake that threatened Peter and the others. We know fears; regrets; conflict; confusion. We suffer loss; sickness; doubt. So the question follows: *what does Jesus say to the human heart "in the darkness?" What does the Redeemer, the Prince of Peace, whisper to us in our times of greatest need?*

We know from the Scriptures and the testimony of the saints that even in whispers, Jesus has a broad vocabulary. He may say words of **hope and perseverance** – this too shall pass; do not surrender your faith; do not be afraid. There are words of **encouragement and sometimes challenge**: along with the trial will come the strength to endure; fear is useless, what is needed is trust; whatever you do for the least, you do for Me. There are words of **healing and peace and serenity**: come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest; you cannot change the past but you can better the future; I am with you always. But above all, there are simple, direct words of **love** – Christ says to each of us: “You are not alone. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have called you, and you are mine.”

Like Peter, we can go from overconfidence to sinking in a moment, both of them taking our eyes off of the real power that faith in Jesus brings to our lives: not necessarily to prevent suffering from entering our lives, but the strength to endure and come through and grow in our trust and compassion for others.

Doubts and fears, regrets and sorrows will continue to thunder in our ears, seeking to rob us of our peace. But Jesus will also be whispering words of healing and hope and love. Precisely in the midst of the storm, just when we need Him, we can call out to Him. Like the burning bush, or the figure walking on the water, or a quiet whisper, He may reveal Himself in ways we do not expect. But He will be there to take our hand, reassuring us: *Ego eimi ... It is I ... do not be afraid.*