

A Hand to Catch Us

August 10, 2008

(Pentecost 13 - Year A)

Matthew 14:22-33

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Back in 1988, after Susan became pregnant with our oldest son, Scott, one of our first purchases was a camcorder.

We bought a camcorder so that we could take videos of all of Scott and John's early years growing up.

A few years ago, as a Christmas present to Susan, I had all of our old VHS tapes of our son's early years converted onto DVDs.

We now have 18 DVDs in our collection of childhood memories: 16 of those DVDs are of Scott - and 2 DVDs are of John.

Occasionally, we will get out the old family videotapes and watch them. One event that we have recorded for posterity is an afternoon when we had taken little Scott swimming.

Susan and I had obviously taken turns getting in the water with Scott - so that one of us could swim and the other one of us could film the event using our camcorder.

In the first scene, you can see Susan in the water with Scott. She is holding him up, with her hands under his belly, so that he is gliding across the top of the water.

In the next scene, you can see *me* in the water with Scott. I am also holding Scott up, with my hand under his belly. But instead of him gliding across the top of the water, I let Scott really get down into the water.

Sometimes water goes up his nose,
Sometimes he gets water in his mouth,
Sometimes I let go, just for a second, so he experiences a little more of what it is like to swim and to paddle.

Then, you can hear Susan's voice in the background on the video, chastising me:

"Jeff, you are letting Scott sink too far down into the water!"

And I defensively reply back:

“But my hand is always underneath him to catch him.”

Peter, a follower of Jesus, sees Jesus walking on the water toward their boat.

The disciples of Jesus are terrified, thinking that Jesus is a ghost.

Courageous Peter, however, shouts out:

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

So, Jesus replies: “Come!”

And then, Peter hops out of the boat and begins to walk on the water.

However, when Peter begins to notice the strong wind, he realizes that

he is not gliding across the water, but he is getting water in his nose and his mouth and he feels like he is sinking.

Peter screams out:

“Lord, save me!”

And Jesus immediately reaches out his hand to Peter.

For Jesus’ hand is always underneath us, ready to catch us in the storm.

Last Friday night, I was flipping around channels on TV during a commercial break from the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympics - and I landed on CNN, on Larry King Live.

Larry King had as his guests that evening Steven Curtis Chapman and his family.

In case you do not know who Steven Curtis Chapman is, he is a contemporary Christian singer and songwriter who has recorded an abundant amount of music in the last two decades.

Susan and I know many of his songs, mainly because Steven Curtis Chapman is from Paducah, Kentucky, Susan’s hometown.

At any rate, Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife, Mary Beth, have six children.

And last May, their 17-year old son named Will was driving their family car into the driveway.

Suddenly, their 5-year old daughter, Maria, excitedly jumped down from her jungle gym, and ran toward her brother.

Will did not see Maria running toward the car - and he ended up running over his little sister, killing her almost instantly.

The Steven Curtis Chapman family was on the Larry King show last Friday night, sharing the journey of grief that they have traveled since the death of their little daughter and sister, Maria.

You can imagine the guilt and the terrible feelings that their son, Will, has felt, since he was responsible for his sister's death.

And in the midst of their grief, in the midst of the strong winds and the storms of life that have come upon the Chapman family's boat, I was extremely moved Friday night - watching this family's faith.

The Chapman family's faith is not a blind, stupid acquiescence. They were not on the Larry King show saying any of those idiotic things that some people do in the wake of a tragedy, things such as: "It was God's will" or "God needed another angel in heaven."

No - instead, the Chapman family spoke about their anger, about their guilt, about their uncontrollable grief, about the counseling and therapy sessions that they now attend to bring about some amount of healing.

Yet, in the midst of their storm of grief, in the midst of their waves of guilt,

Each member of this family also spoke to the fact that the hand of Jesus always reaches out to them, grabbing them so that they do not sink to the bottom.

For the hand of Jesus is always underneath them to catch them.

I know that many of us here have experienced time in the storm, when the strong winds are blowing and when water is coming into our nose and our mouth and when we feel like we are beginning to sink.

All of us, at one time or another, have cried out, like Peter did:

"Lord, save me!"

And then, the hand of Jesus reaches out and catches us.

However, usually the hand that reaches out for us is not the actual hand of Jesus himself.

Usually the hand that is always underneath us to catch us is the hand of

some other human being.

Many times that hand that reaches out and catches us - is the hand of someone else in this community of St. Alban's.

One of the reasons why we are a part of a church family is so that we can uphold each other and reach out to each other when we feel like we are beginning to sink.

For the faith of St. Alban's Episcopal Church is not some blind, stupid acquiescence.

We are a people who have an active faith, a faith that knows that we will not sink to the bottom, because the hands of our brothers and sisters in Christ are always underneath us to catch us.

And our active faith comes from the Cross of Jesus Christ.

For, on that Cross, Jesus himself stepped out of the boat and into the storm.

On that cross, Jesus drank deeply from the cup of suffering and pain.

On that cross, Jesus was not abandoned to the power of death, but his Father's hand was underneath him all the time to raise him up on the third day.

So, do not be afraid to get out of the boat and follow Jesus into the storm.

When you are grieving the death of your parents or your spouse,

When you are suffering from poor health,

When you are sinking under the weight of financial problems,

When you are addicted or tired or lonely -

Do not be afraid.

For Jesus' hand is always underneath you,

Ready to catch you.

AMEN.

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