

Current Homilies:

[8.12.17 Homily: Nineteenth Ordinary](#)

[8.19.17 Homily: Twentieth Ordinary](#)

8.12.17 Homily

Nineteenth Ordinary

1 Kgs 19:9-13; Ps 85:9-14; Rom 9:1-5; Matt 14:22-33

Elsie Hainz McGrath

Listen, O people, in the silent Chapel of your heart. ... So began the psalmist today, tying together the disparate loose ends from the mountaintop of Horeb to the sea of Galilee. These are stories of life and death and transformation, such as we here have survived and witnessed in the last days of Catie's passing over.

Though I've always loved today's Elijah story, I have also always puzzled over it a bit. Because *of course* God is in the wind and in the earthquake and in the fire. But the *point* is that Elijah could not *hear* God in those chaotic circumstances. And Elijah was running for his life. Or running away from it. He was fleeing the troops of Queen Jezebel, and actually suicidal. But he *did* hear God tell him to get over himself and get himself up the mountain when he had decided to lay down and die. Because it was *quiet* there, but for the sound of his own heartbeat pounding in his ears. Ergo, after the passing of the ominous happenings on the mountaintop, in that still lull at the end of the storm, Elijah was *intently* listening to the quiet. And heard the voice of God speaking from deep within his wildly beating heart.

Like Elijah, in a sense, Jesus heads off to the mountaintop because God bids him go there. To escape the stress and the demands and the noise of the ever-increasing crowds of people who do not give him an iota of quiet time. He needs that time to rejuvenate, to be able to hear the still small voice of God within himself, to keep his bearings in a world that threatened to render him overwrought. So he sent the disciples home on their own across the waters of the Galilee, and climbed to the still sanctuary, to his inner tabernacle. And when he was refreshed, he found that a storm was raging on the waters, so he went to rescue his team. Ergo, that wonderful story of *How deep is your faith? Really?*

In 1974, the first women ordained as priests in the Episcopal Church cracked the stained-glass ceiling that we continue to chip away at. They were known as the Philadelphia Eleven. One of the 11, Alla Renee Bozarth, penned a poem that has become a sacred piece of my life. It goes like this:

"We do not want to rock the boat," you say, mistaking our new poise for something safe. We smile secretly at each other, sharing the reality that for some time we have not been in the boat. We jumped, or were pushed, or fell. And some leaped overboard. Our bodies form a freedom fleet; our dolphin grace is power. We learn and teach, and as we go each woman sings. Each woman's hands are water-wings. Some of us have become mermaids or Amazon whales, and are swimming for our lives. Some of us do not know how to swim. We walk on water.

I *of course* do not know how to swim. Apparently something of a "fish," according to my mother, before the illness that robbed me of my ears at age 5, I became completely petrified by water. I can still hear the doctor saying, *"Never get water in your ears, you will immediately go deaf."* And I can still remember when I *did* get water in my ears, and the pain that accompanied every ear infection, which were never-ending occurrences in my growing-up years. But I also remember – and love – the water.

I like to think that Peter began to sink not solely based on a weak faith. The wind was in his face. He could not hear the still small voice of the divine within himself over the brisk sound of the wind pounding past his ears. Of course, Jesus saved him. But ultimately, he had to choose to save himself. And sure enough, when the wind died down everybody who was crowded into that little boat could clearly hear. Jesus was God's own son. *Of course* they paid him homage! And began to "get" that *they* were brothers (and sisters) to Jesus.

So what, in their heart of hearts, were they beginning to glean that night? It was surely clear to them that they were truly on a mission that would somehow involve a lot of walking on water. As we begin our program of preparation in RCWP, we are presented with a partial statement that we are asked to finish: *I stand before God with empty hands at the beginning of a path...* In 2006, this is what I wrote:

Click on Year to View Previous Homilies

[2012](#)

[2013](#)

[2014](#)

[2015](#)

[2016](#)

[2017](#)

I worry, Lord, when I come to a crossroads. What if somebody reversed the signs and I take the wrong road? How do I know whom to trust along the way? It seems like everyone is heartless or brainless or at least as scared as I am. And what if some smooth-talking fellow engages my mind. How will I know he's legit and not just another crooked-politician-type? My hands are empty now. I don't seek a yellow brick road, or even more knowledge at this point in my life. But what if you are nothing more than a figment of my imagination? And what if I'm not at all like you?

But I *am* like Jesus. We *all* are. **That is the most important truth we must internalize**, whether from the mountaintop or from the depths. Just like Elijah did. And Peter. And Paul, who clearly came to know that to our ancestors in the faith belongs the same inheritance that is ours. As was declared at Catie's Memorial Mass, according to her express wishes: *Nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.* [romans 8:31-39] **Amen**

Click on Year to View Previous Homilies

[2012](#)

[2013](#)

[2014](#)

[2015](#)

[2016](#)

[2017](#)

8.19.17 Homily

Twentieth Ordinary

Isa 56:6-7; Ps 67:2-3,5-6,8; Rom 11:13-15,29-32; Matt 15:21-28

Elsie Hainz McGrath

Jesus was confused. He thought he was only sent to minister to those of his tribe. Paul was confused. He thought he was to convert his tribe to another one.

Seems some prophets of earlier times, like Isaiah and today's psalmist, didn't have that problem, that sense of parochialism. They recognized that their God was the God of the cosmos, open and receptive to all peoples.

Which isn't to say the *Israelites* were *not* parochial. They absolutely *were*. Otherwise Jesus wouldn't have had a problem with today's poor Canaanite woman and her suffering daughter to begin with. And Paul's vainglory betrays his rationale because jealousy will never bring healing into the world, and anyone who actively tries to cause jealousy in others is surely guilty of the greater sin. Jealousy is never about love; it is always about fear and insecurity.

There were *always* prophets among us who believed that God does not play favorites. Still are. But it's as difficult to hear them today as it was in Isaiah's time. Maybe *more* difficult. *Will* our parochialism *ever* be vanquished? Especially in today's absolutely vitriolic international climate?

P-D journalist Tony Messenger this week wrote a chilling piece, and I quote: *It was August 2014, and I was driving to work. For a few days, images of militarized lines of police backed by armored vehicles staring down black protesters on the streets of Ferguson had been burned into the national psyche. ... This is not St. Louis, I said. ... This is not America, I pleaded. ... Three years later, I realize I got it wrong. ... "The ugly racism and hate being displayed by white supremacists in #Charlottesville is pure evil," I wrote...on Twitter. "This cannot be the new normal in America." Almost immediately I felt some backlash. ... "This is not the new normal," wrote one person. "This is the US. Don't try to change the historical narrative."... Wrote another, "New normal? Ain't nothing new here!" ... Washington University associate professor Jason Purnell wrote... "America isn't better than this. America is this. America CAN be better than this if we finally face that fact."... Charlottesville is America. For far too many Americans, we are not better than this, and we never have been. The arc of American history has much more bending to do before justice even enters the frame. [end quote]*

White privilege. How constantly surprising and disheartening to learn that Tony Messenger and me and obviously lots of other so-called "good" people never *have* and still *don't* "get" it. I wonder, did Heather Heyer get it? I remember, when I was working with Alta Jaco, our first African-American priest in RCWP, that she often spoke of "us" not getting it. And how I never really understood what she was trying to tell me when she would broach that subject.

How in the world did it ever happen to begin with, when our human beginnings are literally rooted in Black Africa? And how in the world are we ever going to eradicate it, when so many of us, especially so many of us who are in positions from which they can gleefully lord it over others, not *only* don't "get" it; they continue to look at other people as if they are lowly Canaanite dogs? And, for that matter, whatever gave us – or Jesus – the idea that dogs are lowlier than human persons are?

It's difficult to always have to start at the beginning, especially when we think we have already advanced so far beyond that point. But we apparently can never hear enough that before we can change anybody else we have to change ourselves. *We* have to be the change we wish to see. And before we can *see* the change we wish to be, we have to remove the log from our own eyes that distorts our vision. Before we can learn to walk we have to learn to crawl. Like today's Canaanite woman did, for the sake of her daughter. And before we can hear the truth that others speak to us we have to listen to our own truth from deep within ourselves. Like Jesus did, so he could be empowered to bring healing into his own life, as well as into the lives of the mother and daughter who were bent before him.

And so we pray that the psalmist's words are true even as we recognize that *it isn't up to God to rescue us*. It is up to us, *as the psalm clearly states: O, that Love's Way would be lived throughout the earth, Love's power embraced by all nations. Love will guide every nation on earth AS THE LEADERS AND PEOPLE OPEN THEIR HEARTS AND RESPOND.*

... **O God, may all the nations praise you.**

Click on Year to View Previous Homilies

[2012](#)

[2013](#)

[2014](#)

[2015](#)

[2016](#)

[2017](#)