

“Enduring Faith”

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Romans 5:1-7

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

The second step, in the twelve steps of the 1,500 year old Benediction spiritual way to inner freedom, is to endure the pains of development and do not give up. Joan Chittister explains: ‘The fourth step to inner freedom is that we must learn to persevere in order to discover what darkness as well as light have to teach us. Life is not a straight line. There are obstacles and obstructions, resistance and regrets in the path everywhere. This fourth step cautions us to hold on, to refuse to give up, to keep trying, until we finally learn the lesson of the moment. It tells us to develop a beginner’s mind, to discover that even the difficult, even the contradictory, has something to teach us. It enables us to understand that there are reasons for darkness, blessings in difficulties, hope to be gained from struggles that scour the soul. The fourth step to freedom tells us to endure through the mist of life’s spiritual night until the light rises once again in us. To bear hard things well is a mark of spiritual maturity’ (‘The Way to Inner Freedom’, p. 25).

In ‘An Enduring Heart,’ she explained further with a story. ‘Everything in life has something to teach us, if we only allow ourselves to look at it deeply enough. I don’t talk about the incident much—for obvious reasons—but I don’t forget it. (I mean, who can you talk to about what you learned from your dog?) His name was Danny. He was one of those wiry, intense, frenetic kind of Irish Setters who goes through life at high speed, laughing all the way. I have dozens of funny stories about him. Those are the ones I tell. There is one story, however, that is not funny at all. It comes back to me at strange times of life, at those moments when I am feeling most defensive and very vulnerable. It was hunting season. The woods behind the monastery are thick, wide and off-limits to hunters. Danny ran in those woods every day. One afternoon he came back from a run, stood looking at me quiet as stone for a moment and then lay down, stretched out the length of the throw rug in front of my desk, and looked at me lethargic and sloe-eyed. Something was wrong; no barking for the biscuit, no nudging my hands off the

keyboard. Just the look. I got up from behind the desk, knelt down beside him and ran my hands through the long scarlet feathering that covered his flanks and rib cage. Then I felt it. He flinched only a hair and then gave a deep, slow sigh. I parted the hair with both hands and saw the bullet hole in his ribs. There had been no sound, no agitation, no hysteria, no meanness. Just the trust that if he looked at me long enough, I would understand; if he waited long enough, it would be all right again. And it was. The vet removed the bullet and, little by little, we loved him back to the same breathless energy and total irrepressibility he'd shown before the shooting. But I was never able to forget the incident as easily as he apparently had. I went on being troubled by the shooting, of course, but as the months went by, I found myself even more overwhelmed by the way the dog had responded to it. I got the distinct impression that it had been a good run in the woods and that it was worth it, come what may. The memory of the event touches my own life yet. I learned the power of vulnerability, of opening yourself to life, of entrusting yourself to other arms, come what may, and presuming, that in the end, it will all have been worth it. I learned from Danny that somehow, someday, if and when we are each cut down in the delirium of life, that we will have all the resources we need to carry us through (The Fine Art of Living, p. 25-26).

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

Matt: 14:28

According to Matthew, Peter learned his first lesson about what he needed to carry him through when he linked the presence of Jesus with Jesus' command. 'He was not asking for supernatural powers but rather the recognition that whatever Jesus commands, Jesus makes possible. In this story we learn that commands of Jesus taken seriously create miracles; they open an incredible reservoir of divine resources. And, apart from such commands, not much unusual is going to happen.' ('Matthew', p. 441).

"Come," Jesus said.

Matt:14:29a

When the command was spoken, Peter got out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus. In his book, 'Cost of Discipleship,'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's wrote: 'Peter had to leave the ship and risk his life on the sea, in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Lord. If Peter had not taken the risk, he would never have learned the meaning of faith . . . The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus. Unless a definite step is demanded, the call vanishes into thin air, and if (people) imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics' (ibid, p441). "When you put your hand to the plow," Alice Paul wrote in the midst of the struggle for woman's suffrage, "you can't put it down until you get to the end of the row." Until we learn to endure the pressures of the gospel, we can never really know its power' (Joan Chittister, The Fine Art of Living, p. 27).

"Lord, save me!"

Matt: 14:29c

After taking the leap of faith, Peter became frightened by the wind, began to sink, and cried out to Jesus. When Jesus saved him, Peter found a steadying, delivering hand. Because he did, patience has replaced frustration, and trust has disarmed fear, in both ancients and moderns alike. Patience and faith is the glue of endurance that frees us to pursue the good news of the gospel, no matter how long it takes. The ancients explain it in this way: "How many snowflakes does it take to break a branch?" the snowy owl asked a snowflake. "I don't know for sure, but it must be about a million," the snowflake answered back." "And how many have fallen now?" the owl went on. "Oh, I suppose about five thousand maybe," the snowflake calculated. "Then why do you go on with such a fruitless task?" the snowy owl persisted. "Because," the snowflake answered with a touch of exasperation, "I want to do my part" (Joan Chittister, 'Radical Spirit, p. 83).

Prayer: Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light, take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home. Amen.