

In the Squall's Midst

Job 38:1, 8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41

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It's possible that the story of Jesus' calming of the sea reflects the experience of the early Christian communities, who lived their faith in the middle of persecution, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Yet the story also reflects the turbulent conditions in which many of our present-day Christian communities live.

Our Gospel passage is found within a larger section where Mark describes the character of discipleship. The question Mark asks is, Who is Jesus' true disciple?

A force in testing the disciple's formation is the spirit of evil. It seems that turbulence of all kinds is an effect of this spirit's presence. Beyond that, the spirit of evil consists of elements that cross the disciple's path and that are not completely under his control. But note the paradox: When I, the would-be disciple, try to eliminate this spirit completely, when I put all my efforts into establishing and maintaining "security," I find that fear and anxiety seize me. And then if I bring this spirit into my faith community, I find that the fear and anxiety intensify within the group and paralyze it.

Jesus is all alone, sleeping, in the midst of the storm. He is free of the group contagion.

Yet true disciples, both as individuals and as members of communities, learn to live in turbulence. The members of the migrant community have learned to live and celebrate in the midst of fear. They know how poorly it pays to try to prevent unpleasant, even disastrous things from happening. They have learned to calculate the risks they have to take in order to assure the survival of their families.

The person who knows that his or her stay in a place is considered illegal develops the wisdom of the old saying: "If you can't change it, learn to live with it."

The migrant community is like the "faithful remnant" the prophets speak of. It lives in the midst of a "squall." Moments come when it sees that everything is lost, that there's no way out. But it's precisely here that the community finds and retains attitudes of patience and confidence.

I think that the Book of Job's profound understanding of the suffering of the just—where it is argued that that suffering is not the consequence of sin—I think this discussion connects very well with the drama of migrant families. The God whom the suffering Job hopes to encounter has other standards of justice and right than those that are measured by material security or its absence. Migrant believers preserve this same paradigm of faith. They discover an image of God that passes the usual limits. They welcome a God who does not punish the innocent, and they hope that this God will keep accompanying them in every storm at sea, perhaps sleeping in that same boat apparently on the point of shipwreck.

Paul assures us in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." The person of faith bears in him or herself the presence of Lord. This is the same presence discovered by Job and recognized in the squall's midst by the disciples. His comforting presence arrives with astonishing lucidity when the spirit of evil and its heavy waves harass us.