

SPG#179, Pentecost 13A, Proper 14

August 10, 2008

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

Recently I watched the movie entitled "The Prestige," which is about magicians and how they work with illusion. And I thought of the occasional special on TV put on by David Copperfield that has to do with illusion. In our 21st century lives magic, almost exclusively, has to do with entertainment. People purchase tickets so they can be delighted by the illusions of magicians.

As we have seen many times in our lives there is magic as recorded in the scripture.

But the magic recorded in scripture is not just for the entertainment of the reader, although I am sure that is a by-product. I think it is fairly easy for us to reference our memory of biblical magic. In the Old Testament there was the magic of the parting of the Red Sea. There was Moses' staff turning into a snake before Pharaoh. There was manna from heaven.

In the New Testament a lot of the magic is centered around Jesus himself, although not in every case. Remember when he turned water into wine, the many healings that are recorded. Remember the feeding of 5,000 people with a few loaves and some fish.

In all of those examples and more, biblical magic is seen as being linked to people in their lives. And in almost every case in the Bible the magic is linked to the personal, with an individual or with many. So when Lazarus was brought

back from the dead, it was not just for entertainment. For he was Jesus' friend. And when Jesus heard of his death he wept in grief.

Today's gospel falls right into line with that kind of biblical magic. For the figures involved are Jesus himself, Peter, and other disciples. I would call the story of Jesus walking on the water as one of the more memorable stories in the New Testament. Although, curiously, I would not call it one of the most prominent stories. It is assumed that the reader knows something of the personal connections between Jesus and Peter and the other disciples. It is assumed that the reader knows of the friendship, the love, and the high regard for each other that is present in these relationships. And so, as the story goes, Jesus has been teaching the crowds. At the first of the story he dismisses the crowd and tells the disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side. Presumably he is speaking of the other side of the Sea of Galilee. We might also guess that "the other side" refers to Capernaum where Peter lived. He tells them to go to the other side while he goes up into a mountain to pray. When evening came he was there by himself praying. The disciples, meanwhile, are having a hard time getting to the other side. For the wind is against them. And so as opposed to getting to the other side, they are more out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee all night. We pick up the story at that point. By now it is early in the morning on the next day. And the Gospel of Matthew says, **And early in the morning Jesus**

came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

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

Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong 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."

After reading this story many times you realize that it revolves around Jesus walking on the water and Peter's attempt to walk on the water. At the same time it is about the disciples' fear and their relationship to Jesus and their recognizing him on the water. As is the case with many New Testament stories, it is packed with implications and assumptions. I have carried this story with me for about 10 days before today. At first, I kept repeatedly seeing the figure of Jesus on the surface of the water, surrounded by the presence and sound of strong wind and large waves. But as I read the story again, and thought about it a few times, I began to have more of an appreciation of the disciples and how much

their recognition of him meant, in the face of their fear, while the wind blew and the waves crashed. The events of the story seem to be carefully orchestrated by the writer. Jesus could have been in the boat with them and could have said, "I'm going to show you a little trick I picked up in my spiritual life. Watch this!"

But instead there was no preparation, and he came to them on the water, waiting to be recognized.

I am sure that Peter was at first terrified as the other disciples. But close behind his fear was Jesus' announcement that it was him. And so, as recognition began to sink in, it was then that Peter decided to take a risk when he said, **If it really is you, command me to come walk on the water too.** And so it is that Peter actually walked on the water for a while until he became afraid of the wind and began to sink. But even then he was able to ask for help which he received.

For little Cyrus Dobe, via the sacrament of Baptism, he will hopefully begin a life of recognitions that will fit the particular pattern of his own life. Perhaps some of

those recognitions will be dramatic, like seeing Jesus walking on water. Or perhaps they will be less dramatic, but nonetheless significant.

For all of us, Jesus moves towards each of us and all of us, waiting for our recognitions of him.

And I think he waits for us to take a risk like Peter did that would constitute the next step in our spiritual lives. We could say that Peter's action was a failure. But what if he had never tried?

Then he could never have claimed to walk on the water with Jesus even for those few moments. May we in the boat be drawn to that fantastic figure, and may we be willing to take a risk that could lead to a life of faith that may be as unforeseen as it is unprecedented. Amen.