

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Now I do not know for sure but I suspect the vast majority of you, and probably even **all** of you, are a lot like me today, simply shell shocked. And do you know what? You, we have every right to be. After all, this has been the week from hell in literally so many ways. First, early on Monday we learned that our longtime pastor, Pastor Joel, had gone home to his loving and merciful God. And then, secondly, the fires of hell struck our beautiful island paradise and directly or indirectly effected all of us. We lived with fear for communities, fear for our families and friends, and mostly fear for our ourselves. And now, we with fear comes grief, grief for all those same things. Yet many of us still gathered ourselves together and began looking for ways to help and serve others. I cannot tell you how absolutely amazed and proud I am of you and to be part of you in this challenging time. I also cannot tell you all the individuals and congregations that have reached out to me, us in a variety of ways offering assistance and prayers for KLC and for Maui. Needless to say, I am overwhelmed at both the generosity and the love being shown.

As I have thought about our trials and experiences this week, the words of two great hymns came to mind. I will share some words from one now and from the other a little later. In 1852, Cecil Alexander wrote the hymn "Jesus calls us." The first and last lines of the first verse read: "Jesus calls us o'er the tumult" and "Saying, 'Christian, follow me.'" That, my friends, is God's call to us every day but **especially** today.

The second thing I discovered this week was about our readings today. I do not think I could have picked any more appropriate readings for today. For example, our first reading has Elijah in a cave on Mount Horeb. Why? Well as I already said in the kupuna moment, Elijah was scared and wanted to be near God. Do you see a similarity and a difference between Adam and Eve and God in the garden and Elijah and God on the mount? In the first God said: "**Where are you?**" and in this one God says: "**What are you doing here?**" which could said "Why are you here?"

So, in our gospel reading today, the disciples are in a boat on the sea in a storm. Sound familiar? Well it should because there are actually two similar but still different stories like this in the gospels. Each of the gospels has at least one of these stories and two of the gospels contain **both** of these stories. The first story is about the disciples and Jesus crossing the sea in a storm and the disciples becoming afraid. This story is in all three synoptic gospel; Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The second story is in our gospel reading today and has the disciples once again crossing the sea in waves and wind but no storm. What they become afraid of is Jesus coming to them unexpectedly while walking **on** the water. This story is in Matthew and Mark and also John.

Can you identify some common elements between these two stories? How about a boat, the disciples, Jesus, a pseudo storm and a real storm. Okay, How about some differences? In the first story Jesus is with the disciples the whole time, albeit asleep, and the disciples awaken Jesus who then quiets the storm and the disciples **wonder** just who Jesus is. In the second story Jesus joins the disciples later by walking on the water, Peter asks to join Jesus and does so but then begins to sink when he takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the waves and the wind around him. Then the disciples **proclaim** Jesus' divinity. This is like a watershed moment for the disciples, pun intended, they have gone from wonder to proclamation.

Of course the obvious or most simple moral to this story is for us to always keep our eyes on Jesus which reminds me of my second song for today which was written in 1922 by Helen Lemmel. Its words are: "*O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? There's light for a look at the Savior, And life more abundant and free!*" And then the refrain is "*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.*"

The truth is that we can make this story about the disciples or Jesus or Peter or even storms or **just** walking on water and I think any one of these may be right depending on our **own** context. But ultimately I believe this story is primarily about faith and focus. And I firmly believe the importance of those two parts of our lives cannot be at all overstated in the turmoil that has a hold on our communities and our lives at this time.

Matt Skinner wrote this week about the nature of faith in the following. "*It is the nature of faith – humble, active faith – to be willing to throw oneself into a disorderly world and expect to encounter Jesus there. It is the nature of faith , even "little Faith," to want to transcend the normal "rules" and see what possibilities might be brought into being. It is the nature of faith to wonder what other supposedly unalterable outcomes Jesus might want us to take part in messing with. It is the nature of faith even to waiver from time to time, when it has stepped into stressful, unfamiliar terrain.*"

Did Peter **really** think he could walk on water? And what would **that** have proved anyway? Peter was kind of silly was he not? Maybe Peter hoped that by stepping out on the sea, **that** would be the act of courage he **needed** for faith.

I think Bonhoeffer was saying a similar thing when he said: "*Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies, therefore the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes.*"

Listen now to the poem Footprints in the Sand by Margaret Power: "*One night I dreamed a dream. I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. When the last scene of my life shot before me I looked back at the footprints in the sand. There*

was only one set of footprints. I realized that this was at the lowest and saddest times of my life. This always bothered me and I questioned the Lord about my dilemma. "Lord, You told me when I decided to follow You, You would walk and talk with me all the way. But I'm aware that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I just don't understand why, when I need You most, You leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you, never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Are you, we trusting God implicitly?

Hear then the good news:

Maybe Jesus is saying to us that faith means living out of our hearts not our mind.

Maybe Jesus is saying we need to lead, live, and love with our hearts and once again, not with our mind.

Maybe Jesus is saying to us you know who I am, you know me deep down in your heart, and you know I **will** be there.

Maybe Jesus is saying trust yourself, trust your heart, **and** trust me.

God is with us in the difficult part of our lives, responding to our fears and cries for help with the promise of God's presence and comfort.

God is with us in our need.

God calls us to whole-hearted lives of courage and hope.

Believe, hope, trust.

Grace and peace to you, my friends, from the God who is simply **with** us.

Amen