

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

I am reading a book now by the New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman, entitled “Thank You for Being Late.” It is a book about how technology, globalization and climate change are advancing at speeds so fast that it is difficult for humankind to catch up.

While my grandfather, Willie Driscoll, who died in 1969 lived during a time of great change from a time of no indoor plumbing or electricity to men walking on the moon, I think that it can be argued that the world has change even more between 1969 and today due to technology, globalization and climate change.

What has been your experience of change? Does it seem to be getting out-of-control? Are you beginning to experience some chaos in your life because of it? The scripture readings today give us some insight into God and chaos. Take for example the first reading from the Old Testament Book of Kings. In it we hear a story about the prophet Elijah. Prophets lived chaotic lives and Elijah’s life is no exception. The reading takes us back to a time when Elijah is fleeing from Queen Jezebel who has a contract out on his life. He is trying to get as far away from her as he can! In the midst of his flight he encounters God. God doesn’t appear to him in the form of a heavy wind or an earthquake or a fire but in the form of a whispering sound. God appears to him in the midst of personal chaos to assure him that he is not alone. That was enough. With that, Elijah could go on.

In the gospel reading chaos comes to Jesus’ disciples while they are in a fishing boat being tossed about by strong winds on the Sea of Galilee. In the midst of being tossed about they see Jesus walking on the water. They are initially terrified by his appearance believing that

they are seeing a ghost. Jesus, however, tries to calm them down saying to them “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Impetuous Peter is one of the disciples in the boat. His faith in Jesus is such that he leaps out of the boat confident that he too can walk on water. His faith quickly leaves him, however, when the winds become even stronger. Jesus saves him and then asks him “... why did you doubt?”

The message of these two scripture readings is simple but profound and that is, that we are not alone in the midst of our chaotic lives. God is always present. There is a true story told about a twelve year Jewish boy who was a prisoner at a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. One day he and a few adults were paraded before all the prisoners of the camp before they were placed on the gallows to be hung to death. It took the boy, since he was not very heavy, a long time to die with the noose around his neck. As he struggled someone shouted out “Where is God?” Someone else responded, “God is there on the gallows.”

The chaotic world that we live in both reveals and hides the presence of God. If it only revealed God then everyone would believe. If it only hid God then no one would believe. What kind of chaos do you experience in your life? Have you experienced God in the midst of it? If not, why?