



Thoughts on the Journey

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August 9, 2020 – Mt 14:22-33

There is a plaque that sits on the book shelf in my office. A friend gave it to me a number of years ago. It reads: *“A woman is like a tea bag; you never know how strong she is until you put her in hot water”*. I have looked at that plaque more times than I can remember and often it makes me think of people who find themselves in hot water: people who are struggling with the challenges and storms of life. Over my years in ministry, I have met many people seeking support and understanding about how their trials relate to God and his will. In my recent memory there are a number of people who stand out in my mind, but for the sake of this article, I will recall one woman's story of faith.

Small in stature, she carries herself with poise and grace. Her gait is steady and sure, subtly announcing she's a woman with a mission. Fran wears the joy of her faith that settles in her smile and in the tone of her voice. Storms come to all of us at one time or another and Fran is no exception. Fran's tempest blew into her life in 2018 when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Her initial reaction was that she didn't want this challenge to take her into the *dark night of the soul*. Instead, Fran praised God for her early diagnosis because he revealed it to her in time to treat it. With God as her guide and a physician for a husband, she was connected to a Catholic faith-filled doctor who performed surgery within 2 weeks. Just when all seemed to be going well, in 2019 she had a mammogram that revealed a cancerous lump and 2 positive lymph nodes. The pain from her surgery was like none she had experienced before, but in her words, *“I learned to love the pain because I could align myself with Christ's suffering.”* Radiation took her hair and even worse for her, her eyelashes. Again, Fran gave thanks to God because she saw it as an opportunity to work on her pride, her vanity, and her self love.

In this scene from Matthew's gospel, after Jesus fed the multitude of people, he asked the disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side of the sea. Alone, the Lord went on the mountain to pray. Meanwhile, the boat that carried the disciples was a few miles off shore being tossed about by strong winds and high waves. In the middle of the night, Jesus came toward them walking on the water. When the disciples saw him they thought he was a ghost and cried out in fear.

“Jesus said to them, Take courage, it is I; Do not be afraid”

Peter said to Jesus, “If it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus replied, “Come”. Peter stepped out of the boat and began to walk on the water. Distracted by the strong wind he became frightened, took his focus off Jesus, and then began to sink. He cried out to Jesus, “Lord save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter.

We can all relate to fear when we are confronted with storms in our lives. The difference in how well we ride these storms, is whether we keep our focus on Jesus or sink into our fears. In February, Fran's storm raged on with news she had metastatic breast cancer with lesions in the bone, the liver, and the lungs. Fran's beautiful witness is that she weathers her storms well because she doesn't let the wind distract her and she never takes her eyes off her Savior, trusting in his divine providence. She shared a card with me that she received from a friend about a mighty oak being ravaged by the wind. The oak lost all of it's leaves and some of it's branches. The wind then asked the oak, “How come you're still standing?” and the oak replied, “I have roots that stretch into the earth and you will never touch them.” So is true with Fran who is deeply rooted in her faith and trust in our Lord. In her words, “I have no expectations other than to love Christ and I want to love him for everyone who cannot love.” Some people come into our lives and remind us of God's unfathomable love for each one us. Fran has done that for me on my journey of faith and I am grateful.

