

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval, my strength, my rock, and our providence. Amen.

This past Thursday, August 6 we remembered, the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki where over 200,000 men women and children were killed. Since the 80's the 70,000 nuclear weapons have dropped to 13,890 of which our United States and Russian are owners of 90% of the weapons. The "New Start" Treaty was signed in April of 2010, which aimed to limit further resources in strategic offensive weapons. In contrast with this, Russia and the US have simultaneously launched large and expensive programs to replace and modernize their warheads, missile launch systems, and nuclear weapons production facilities. Of the 13,890 nuclear weapons estimated worldwide, 3,750 are deployed with task forces and nearly 2,000 of them are maintained on high operational alert according to the Federation of American Scientists. Most immediately concerning is New START, the New Start Treaty which expires in February 2021. Russia and the United States can extend the New START treaty by up to 5 more years. Should be a no-brainer, right? Will we have leaders in our country and in our world that will act responsibly to preserve this essential agreement. In recognition of this 75th anniversary, the Federation of American Scientists has joined a coalition of nuclear weapons organizations and survivors in calling for our leaders to take the actions necessary to ensure nuclear weapons are never used again and to negotiate in good faith the global elimination of these most devastating weapons of mass destruction. Part of their statement reads: "People created these weapons and designed the systems governing their use; people can work to eliminate them."

We live in these in-between moments in life and history. Moments between stepping out of the boat and walking towards a Jesus who first steps towards us. Richard Rohr focuses on this in his next weeks daily meditations. He says, "It seems quite clear that we grow by passing beyond some perfect Order, through an often painful and seemingly unnecessary Disorder, to an enlightened Reorder or resurrection. This is the universal pattern that connects and solidifies our relationships with everything around us." We are in that unrest, in-between moment right now, the seemingly unnecessary disorder of the pandemic, of racial justice, and of our political scene.

In today's gospel Jesus says, "Take heart." A more literal translation of the Greek would be, "Take courage." During this pandemic our Bishop, Laurie Skow-Anderson keeps telling us that the most important thing we can do and keep doing right now is communicating. In the midst of a disaster you stay connected in anyway you can. You communicate more so people stay connected and safe. Disconnecting, or refusing to use the means we are so fortunate to have these days, can only lead to more disaster, more disorder. Just think for a moment of all the ways people connected, and communicated around the world the need to honor the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In order to get to reorder we must go through disorder. This week there were six of us from our two congregations on a zoom forum sponsored by the Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA and the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. We learned by simply connecting to this forum that there are hundreds of individuals and families being released from detention centers, which one of the presenters named prisons. The Southwestern Texas Synod of the ELCA and the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas are looking for individuals, families, congregations, and or communities that are willing to sponsor individuals or families. This would not be an easy task. But Jesus is walking towards us and saying, "Take Heart," "Take courage", the night is dark, the waves are high, the wind is against you, but I'm not a ghost, I am. Ground yourself in me.

Jesus is talking about "life giving courage," not a power based, locked and loaded kind of courage that threatens, but a courage grounded in the I Am of Jesus. I am the light of the world. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection. It is the same I Am of the burning bush that gave Moses the courage to lead the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt.

Whether its protesting nuclear weapons, or joining a zoom, or reading a book about racial justice, or being a neighbor to a family that knows a disorder that we can hardly believe, life giving courage seeks reconciliation and the well being of all people. It has no interest in destroying or humiliating the other. It is the courage "dedicated to evolution rather than revolution," a quote from Chittister's book, *Between the Dark and the Daylight*. The courage to grow up and live the gospel. Ultimately, life giving courage looks, speaks, acts, and loves like Jesus. Life giving courage does

not mean we won't be afraid. It is, rather, the means by which we face our fear.

Jesus reaches out his hand and saves Peter. His comment and question to Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt," would be better translated as, "You of little trust, why did you hold back?" The issue is loyalty and trust, and not getting distracted in times of unrest and disorder.

At the time we step out of the boat to the time Jesus comes forward and lifts us up is the in-between time. Our book study "Beauty" by John O'Donahue named this in-between place or time, providence. O'Donahue writes: "providence is another name for the kindness of God. Providence is the power of latent blessing that fore-brightens our pathway. If we could realize how wise the providence around us is, it would give us immense confidence on our journey. The irony is that we don't have to worry. We can take a lot more risks than we realize. It is interesting to ask: what are the limits you have set for your life? Why do you think you cannot go beyond them? How real are they? Did you construct these limits out of anxiety and fear? If you were to go beyond your most solidly set limits, what difference would it make to your life? What are you missing by remaining confined?"

Notice that Jesus doesn't make the wind go away, or throw Peter and us backwards into the boat, or even tell us to stop walking on the water... Jesus brings us through. Jesus pulls us out of sinking, stinking death, into unexpected new life. New life on the other side of change and new ways of being.

Debbie Thomas says, "In my mind, the power of this Gospel story doesn't lie in Peter's faith, doubt, courage, or fear. Peter's trajectory — fascinating though it is — is not the point of the reading. Jesus's trajectory is the point, because unlike Peter's, it never changes. It is constant, focused, relentless, and uni-directional. From the very beginning of the story, Jesus moves towards his disciples. In other words, Jesus never stops moving towards the ones he loves. He never stops crossing the dark water to come to where we are. Neither our fearfulness nor our faithlessness ever alters his steady approach. We are the ones he's bound for. Our flailing bodies are the ones he pulls out of the water. Ours is the boat he climbs into. It is for us that he calls out across the terrifying waves, again and again and again: "Take heart, Take courage. I am. Amen."