

Our Sunday Readings

I KINGS 19:9a, 11-13a
 PSALM 85:9-14
 ROMANS 9:1-5
 MATTHEW 14:22-33

Theophanies

I KINGS 19:9a, 11-13a

Reading closely

1. Imagine that you're Elijah.
 - a. What's it like in the cave?
 - b. What do you think will happen to you?
 - c. How do you react to the wind, and then the earthquake, and then the fire?
 - d. How do you know when God is truly presenting himself?
 - e. Why do you hide your face?
 - f. What all do you feel as you stand at the entrance of the cave?
 - g. How does this experience change you?

Living the word

2. In what ways is God misrepresented?
3. Who is God to you?
4. How will you continue to discover who God truly is?

THE FIRST READING

Back to the mountain

Elijah lived during the reign of King Ahab of Israel. Ahab married Jezebel, a Phoenician, who worshiped Baal, a foreign god, and promoted the worship of Baal throughout Israel. When God sent Elijah to challenge the prophets of Baal, the challenge ended with the deaths of those

prophets. Jezebel, furious, tried to kill Elijah (I Kings 16:29f and 18f).

The prophet fled into the desert toward Mount Sinai, (also called *Horeb*). This is where God first made a covenant with his people, who agreed to worship only him. Just as Moses presented the terms of the Sinai Covenant to the Israelites, so now Elijah must renew this covenant, leading the Israelites back to the worship of God alone.

A reassuring silence

Baal was a storm god. People believed he caused wind and earth-shaking thunder. When the LORD demonstrated his clear superiority to Baal in the contest led by Elijah, some people expected the LORD to assume these powers. However, God is so great that he doesn't need special effects to signal his presence. God's word communicates power even when that word is barely audible.

*“Take courage, it is I.
 Do not be afraid.”*

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Imagine that you're one of the disciples.

1. What time of day is it?
2. How does Jesus dismiss you and the crowds?
3. What do you see when you look back at the shore?
4. How big is your boat?
5. What is it like in the boat?
6. What do you say and do?
7. How do you react to the rough weather?
8. What exactly do you see out on the water?
9. Why are you *terrified*?
10. What do you hear?
11. Do the words give you courage?
12. Do you ask Jesus to command you to join him on the water?
13. If you get out of the boat, do you think you'll reach Jesus?
14. Do you need Jesus to grasp your hand?
15. Are you ashamed of being afraid?
16. How do you react when the weather changes?
17. What do you believe about Jesus?
18. Do you want to reverence him?
19. Is there anything you want to say to Jesus?
20. What all do you think about as you continue across the water?

THE GOSPEL READING

Treading the sea

At the time of Jesus the sea symbolized the chaos or emptiness that preceded creation. The sea was a dangerous and sometimes deadly realm. Passages in the Old Testament portray God subduing the sea and rescuing people who are drowning (Psalm 77:17-21 and 107:23-30; Jonah 2). By walking on the sea at night Jesus reveals that he shares God's power over evil and death. This story is thus a *theophany*, the showing of a divine presence.

Floundering

Peter wants to show his faith in Jesus by joining his master on the water. He trusts Jesus enough to leave the safety of the boat, but the intensity of the wind scares him. Peter dramatizes the meaning of *little faith*: he has faith, but his faith is not yet strong enough to withstand his fear and doubt.

Big title, little faith

The disciples respond to this theophany by bowing down before Jesus and calling him *the Son of God*. They formally acknowledge that Jesus shares God's life-saving power.

Although the disciples' response is very different here than in Mark's version of the story (6:45-52), their faith isn't perfect. Even at the end of Matthew's Gospel the disciples simultaneously *worship* the risen Jesus and *doubt* his glorification and empowerment (28:17).

The boat & the storm

As this story was told and retold, people began to make the boat represent the church. The storm then represented anything that endangered the church and caused Jesus' followers to question their faith in him.

Matthew encourages such an interpretation by writing that *those who were in the boat* gave homage to Jesus instead of writing that *the disciples* did (v.33). He invites us to include ourselves among "those in the boat" who have faith but who still sometimes struggle to believe just as the first disciples did. Jesus supports us just as he supported them.

PRAYER

adapted from St. Cyprian of Carthage

We pray to you, Lord,
with honest hearts,
in tune with one another,
entreating you with sighs and tears,
as befits our humble position.

We are placed between those who have no concern for you and the saints who stand firm and upright before you.

We pray that you will soon come to us,
leading us from darkness to light,
oppression to freedom,
misery to joy, conflict to peace.

May you drive away the storms and tempests of our lives and bring gentle calm. Amen.