

It is common for us to hear Christians talking about having a personal relationship with God. There are many intimate details in the gospels that help us bond with God, to know Jesus as one of us. He wept at Lazarus' tomb. He changed water into wine for the sake of a wedding party. He was born, a baby in a stable. He rested and prayed. We can imagine that we know him.

Having a personal Savior is, indeed, desirable. If God were nothing but vast and other, to what would we cling when we are lost and alone? In baptism, you were welcomed into God's family, but not as some generic human being. God welcomed *you*, the unique you. We can imagine, when we need comfort and cannot find it among our peers that Jesus is there with a hug and listening ear. We need this intimacy. In fact, it was the point of God's incarnation – to be here in time and space with us.

There are other times when an intimate God is nice, but not first and foremost what we need. Sometimes we need a God of power – one who is definitely in control, because we are so very much *not* in control. Sometimes we need a big “daddy” who will rescue us from the bullies. Sometimes we need God's feminine side – a great “mother” who will provide the order and safety we need when the world is spinning out of control.

Our ancient forebears in faith understood this, too. Remember the first story of creation, and God's power to transform the “without form and void” of pre-creation into order and grace? Recall the rhythm in those opening verses of Genesis?

- “And God said...”
- “And there was...”
- “And God saw that it was good.”
- “And it was evening and it was morning.”

Even in the telling of the story, we are comforted by the repetition – we learn to expect what is next. On the seventh day God rested, as you will recall. This order was God's great gift to us, who so yearn to know what is next.

But there remained then as there do now, places in our world that defy order. The ancients talked about the great sea monster they called “Leviathan” that lived in the deep seas, chaos incarnate. They talked about *Gehenna*, the place where smoldering fires burned always, a place of fear and unknown.

And for us? Don't we yearn for order when ones we love die before their time or when circumstance or luck or fate or whatever you might call it burdens us with differences that challenge us, sometimes even our very survival? What about the power of the natural world, which can change us and our world in an instant? What about influences far beyond our control that pinch our lives – war, environmental degradation, poverty (whether our own or that of others), family dysfunction that reaches back generations and from which we are supposed to heal? When we know the capriciousness of life, when we are forced to or allow ourselves to see clearly the tenuous thread that connects us to the life we imagine, what then? Then we need a God who can stand up to the Leviathan – a big, powerful, all-everything God.

We, like the disciples, come to Jesus, “asleep in the stern” as we are twisting in the wind. We will beg him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

How many of us have done just such a thing? The Psalms are full of these kinds of appeals. We call on our relationship – demand that God hold up God's end of this covenant with us. “God, where are you? Show your face. Get me out of this!”

Because God is faithful, God finds a way to do so, one way or another. Rarely is it instantaneous as it was on the boat that night. But, God's peace comes. New life rises again, even if it happens slowly. This is God's promise, made manifest in Jesus, and we can give testimony that even the worst is redeemed in one way or another eventually. This is God's way with us...which makes Jesus' next question so difficult. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Well...yes. When we face the Leviathan, when chaos threatens to tear apart the world as we know it, when the rug is pulled out from under us...sure enough, the answer is “yes.” We panic, even though we know from the witness of our own lives and the lives of our forebears that God is faithful.

Brothers and sisters, we have two basic alternatives here. We can feel ashamed. Or, we can turn our eyes to the cross where we will see, once again, the God who is

so like us, flesh and blood, and to the grave, where we will see, in its emptiness, the God obeyed by even the wind and sea.

God is both of these things. Jesus was in the stern that night, asleep on the cushion, we are reminded. He was not a super-human. He didn't sleep standing up or anything else extraordinary. He slept on a cushion, no doubt, because it was more comfortable. He was tired after teaching the crowds all day. Like us, he was flesh and blood – one of us, with us. He ate. He slept. He wept. He loved. He got angry. And he died.

But three days later, when his friends and followers were just beginning to wake up to the devastating reality of what had happened to him and to them, his tomb was emptied. Jesus was alive again, risen. Now this *was* beyond reason. This *was* out of the ordinary. This simply didn't happen. A dead man was alive again. He *is not* just completely like us, he is also God, quite other, quite powerful, quite beyond our imagining. He is one who can stand face-to-face with the Leviathan, whatever shape that monster takes in our lives in these days. He is one who can stand face-to-face and demand, "Peace! Be still!" And it will be so.

We will be forgiven over and over again for our panic. We will come again to believe that this God, both intimate and so beyond, is our God, who loves us and promises us a future in God's love. Be filled with great awe, sisters and brothers, for the wind and the sea obey. We are safe. We are God's.