

Inclusive Community

Homily July 26, 2009 2Kings 4:42-44 John 6:1-21 Theme: Rescue

Fred and Terry Quinn

Terry:

I have to admit that when I saw today's theme and read the Gospel, I kept hearing Aretha Franklin singing "Rescue Me" in my head. (Don't worry, we're not singing it as our ending song.) Actually, in today's gospel we witness two instances where Jesus seems to be the rescuer, the one to whom the apostles and disciples can turn to to make all things right, to have enough to eat, to even feel calm while being buffeted by a storm. So, we ask ourselves the question, "Is Jesus indeed the magical rescuer?"

Before we attempt to answer it, let's also look at similar stories told in the Old Testament and the feelings prevalent at the time about the sea and bodies of water. The most immediate reference is our first reading from 2Kings telling of how bread became available to the people through the intervention of a saving God. Another is the well known story from ancient Israel of the Israelites being fed by God in the wilderness following the exodus from Egypt. In the Jewish understanding of God, there was a perception that God (the God up there in the heavens) possessed power over nature. Thus we encounter nature miracles in the gospels, shaped by this belief.

As Bishop Spong tells us-- the disciples of Jesus, in a variety of ways tried to put into words the conviction that they had encountered this God of the Jews in Jesus. Also recall that without current scientific knowledge, there were intense feelings of fear with what must have seemed to the people of the time—an unending sea, huge expanses of water which could flood areas and destroy habitation. The disciples' experience of Jesus was a divine experience with a knowing or sensing that somehow God was part of who Jesus was. So they used narratives about nature miracles, such as walking on water and feeding many people with a few loaves and fish, to demonstrate the presence of God. It was a way to translate their powerful experience of God in Jesus. Jesus was not so

much a rescuer or savior as he was the one who fed a deep hunger in the human soul for the sense of the divine in all of us and in all creation, thus becoming the “bread of life.” Instead of focusing on miraculous rescues, if we focus, not on fear and the need to be rescued, but on the conviction that God is everywhere and the divine spirit of healing, forgiveness and compassion feeds the inner spirit. This spirit feels the calmness of the sea after the storm and the bread of communal divine energy enabling all of us to be rescuers of ourselves and others. I think this is what Jesus was trying to tell us and it kind of reminds me of parenting, or care giving, or teaching—when like Jesus, you do what you can to heal, or inspire, show compassion----- and then the rescuing needs to end and you have to “let go” so that your children, your pupils, those in your care, can grow with the same spirit within them, perhaps becoming rescuers of themselves and those whose lives they touch.

Fred---I have 2 rescue stories –one a true nature story, and one a short sweet tale that actually came to us in an e-mail, tales of the need for a rescue and the after effect within the rescued.

The scene opens with the desperate struggle of a marine conservation officer, Malcolm Smith and a group of volunteers who were working for an hour and a half to save the lives of two pygmy sperm whales. The whales were stranded in an inlet off the coast of New Zealand in March of 2008. The Whales were confused and continued to be disoriented. They had re-stranded themselves four times on the sand bar and could not find their way up the channel and out to sea. Pygmy whales are rarely seen in the open sea, but have been found dead in strandings. There was a possibility that they might have to be euthanized to avoid a slow prolonged death.

Enter the “hero” who has come to save the day. Moko is a bottle-nosed dolphin, well known for playing with swimmers off Mahia beach on the east coast of New Zealand. Moko swam past the volunteers and approached the whales. The dolphin and the whales were heard making noises, apparently to one another. Suddenly the two whales changed their attitude

from being distressed to following the dolphin quite willingly along the beach up the channel and out to sea. The rescue was all over in a matter of minutes.

A marine expert at New Zealand's National Museum said what happened was believable because dolphins have a great capacity for altruistic activities. Perhaps dolphins have something to teach humans.

The second story is fiction but it illustrates an act of rescuing quite beautifully. It's a very simple story but sometimes simplicity helps make a point.

Picture a third grade classroom. Can you remember being in third grade? A nine-year old kid is sitting at his desk. Suddenly a puddle appears at his feet and the front of his pants is wet. He feels that his heart is going to stop because he cannot possibly understand how this happened. He knows that when the boys find out, he will never hear the end of it. When the girls find out, they will never speak to him again as long as he lives.

He puts his head down and prays, "Dear God, this is an emergency! I need help now! Five minutes from now, I'm dead meat.

He looks up from his prayer and sees the teacher approaching him. Maybe he has been discovered.

As the teacher is walking toward him, a classmate named Susie appears carrying a goldfish bowl filled with water. Susie trips in front of the teacher and inexplicably dumps the bowl of water in the boy's lap.

The boy pretends to be angry but all the while saying to himself "Thank you Lord.

Thank you."

Now all of a sudden instead of being an object of ridicule, the boy is the object of sympathy. The teacher brings him to the gym and gives him gym shorts to wear while his pants dry out. The sympathy is wonderful, but as life would have it the ridicule that might have been his is transferred to someone else, Susie.

Finally at the end of the day when they are waiting for the bus, the boy walks over to Susie and whispers, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Susie whispers back, with an understanding smile. "I wet my pants once too." We don't know if anyone had rescued Susie---probably not---but in this case she certainly learned to become the rescuer, and probably became an influence on the boy's future as a rescuer too. So—let us become rescuers when we can, allow ourselves to be rescued when we need it, feeding the spirit within ourselves and others.