

Imagine a boat, a huge boat, a cruise ship, really.

There are approximately 326 million people on this boat.

There are different levels of the boat, first class, super premium 1% first class, upper middle class, middle class, lower class or third class, and then the class that lives on the lowest level, barely above water, no windows in their cabins.

This boat is not very steady.

It is tossing and turning all the time, listing to the left, then listing to the right.

Everyone focuses their attention on the problem straight ahead, then giant swells come at the boat on the sides and catch the passengers and crew off guard.

The boat doesn't even really feel like it has a direction, it might even be turning in circles.

Some people want it to go to one way, other people want it to go to another destination, the people who are in charge of those decisions seem to change their minds everyday.

Many people on the boat feel beholden to the crew.

The senior crewmembers decide where they go, and so that's what the passengers have accepted.

Even if it means going straight into stormy seas.

Even if it means turning in circles.

There are other passengers, however, who aren't willing to accept the state of affairs on this ship.

Some people believe that as far away as the bridge is, as disconnected as they are from the leaders in charge, these people believe that they can organize themselves and make a difference.

These people believe they can tell the ship's engineers to shut down the engines until they get some consensus about where the boat is going.

They believe they can organize, en masse, on the beautiful top deck, where the captain and first mate and others will be able to see them and their signs, so they know that the passengers are unhappy.

The people living on the lower decks of this ship aren't treated well, and so some people are advocating for them as well.

They're saying it's not fair that a few people live in palatial staterooms with balconies and promenades and private dining restaurants, while others are left to share a tiny cabin under the main deck with 3 other people and a restroom down the hall which doesn't get serviced enough.

Some people are committed to making sure that everyone who lives on this ship can be comfortable.

After all, it's a ship, and all these people are stuck on it, in close proximity to one another.

It would be better if they had peace and harmony amongst themselves, it would make the ride much more enjoyable.

Now, imagine that you are on this boat.

You don't have a choice about being on it, you were born on it, and it's your home.

Even though things aren't going well right now, you do love this boat and the people on it.

You remember happy times on it, when things were calm and well.

You know what this boat is capable of.

You know that other people who live on the boat love it too, and you want to see the chaos and fighting come to an end.

So you don't have a choice about being on this boat, but you do have a choice about what you are going to do about its current state of affairs.

Do you feel like you are really far from the captain, too far to actually reach him and talk some sense into him?

Do you feel like you'll never get to anyone who works on the bridge because you're way at the other end of this massive ship?

You can do something for the people who are feeling the effects of the tossing and turning more than you are.

You can help the people who live on the lower decks.

You can give resources to the people who are stuck in the tiny cabins below deck.

You can also stand at the front of the boat with your sign, and add your body to the other bodies who are gathered there, to try and make sure the people on the bridge are able to see you.

You can work with other people who want the boat to go in the same direction that you want it to go in, and you can organize yourselves to tell the captain that you want to go in a certain direction, and why you think the boat should go there and how you think the boat should get there.

Or. You can isolate yourself.

You can act defeated and convince yourself there's nothing you can do, and the trip isn't that terrible for you, and eventually the seas will calm down, so you'll just wait it out in your stateroom.

Or you can sleep on the boat.

You can take some Dramamine or some Ambien and sleep through it all.

You can put your head in the sand, tune out everything that is going on in the boat around you and cope in the easiest way, by sleeping.

I can see why you would want to sleep through all the mess that's happening on the boat.

You, yourself, are feeling afraid, anxious, powerless, so what else are you going to do?

You don't want to join the chaos on the upper deck, that wouldn't be healthy.

All the in-fighting, name-calling, lie-spreading, gossiping, blaming of other people for the problems the boat is having.

You want no part of that.

It's also true that fear can be paralyzing.

When people are really, really afraid, they have a tendency to hunker down or freeze, and they don't have the ability to contribute to solving the problem.

But we're forgetting something.

You, the passenger on this boat, who has a choice about how you are going to respond to the situation at hand...

You are also a person of deep faith.

You believe in a God who abides with us, who never abandons us, who is with us even on that tumultuous boat.

You might be saying to yourself that you aren't sure about where God is in the mess of all this, and if God really was in control, God have calmed the boat and the stormy seas the way Jesus did.

Maybe that's why some are afraid, because they want to believe in God-with-us, but they aren't able to.

Well, I have some news.

“God’s power isn’t in the control of creation or of people, but in being in covenant and relationship with us.

It isn’t in imposing the divine will or insisting on its own way but in sojourning with us as we fumble around and make our way in the world.

God’s power is not in miraculous interventions, pre-emptive strikes in the cosmic war against suffering and evil, but in inviting us to build a kingdom out of love, peace and justice with God.

God’s power is not in the obliterating of what is bad in the world, but in empowering us to build something good in this world.”

(Henson, David. “When God Sleeps Through Storms.” www.patheos.com).

When we see God this way, then we remember that we have the responsibility to try to bring peace and calm and order onto the boat, even though we think it’s beyond what we can do, even though we think we can’t make a difference, even though we are afraid.

It’s in those moments of despair that we lean into our faith in God and remember that God is with us.

God strengthens us for the journey.

God is right here to encourage and embolden us.

God doesn’t want us to sleep through the storm.

God tries to wake us up, to remind us that people on the lower decks need us, other people who are despairing more than we are, they need our faith and our hope, to help encourage them.

Both faith and despair are contagious.

You have the choice of spreading one or the other.

Mr. Rogers famously said, *“When [he] was a boy and [he] would see scary things in the news, [his] mother would say to [him], ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”*

You won't find the helpers if you have isolated yourself in your cabin or decided to sleep through the storm.

Once you leave the comfort of your space, you will find others who are helping, others who need you to help too.

And that fear that you had, it might subside a little.

It might turn into hope, or even resilience.

Jesus' disciples were in a boat on very stormy seas, and they were so afraid they jumped to accusations.

Instead of telling him, 'hey teacher, we need help,' they assumed the worst, and told Jesus, *“Don't you care that we are dying?!”*

That's what happens to us when we become divided and afraid and isolated, we start to assume the worst about others.

But that's not our role.

Our job is to help in whatever way we can, but before we do that, we need to lay our fears, anxieties and concerns on God's doorstep.

After all, one of the most famous phrases of the Bible, said by apostles, angels and prophets is, *“Do not be afraid.”*

We will not let the fear consume or immobilize us.

We will leave it with God, so that we can enter the chaos feeling clear-headed, grounded, and full of love, which we are ready to spread far and wide.

If each of us, as people of faith, are able to do this, all of us on this boat from the lowest deck to the highest, will not only survive, but we, in the end will flourish.

Thanks be to God for each of you.

Amen.

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