

Rescue Me

We had guests recently with four boys aged eight to eighteen. The youngest boy literally learned to swim, and enjoyed it, by being thrown in the deep end and then rescued by his brothers. This way of learning doesn't suit everyone, some people like myself much prefer to wade into things rather than be thrown into the deep end. Yet whatever your personality, the fact is that life provides many occasions when we are thrown in over our heads, and find ourselves in need of help. It starts when we are young. This summer in Yerevan my daughter Nora decided she could climb up the 15 ft play elephant in the park all by herself. She did it! But then a few minutes later tears welled up in our eyes; she couldn't get down! Can you remember a time you got that sinking feeling that you were in over your head and needed rescuing? I had one as a twelve year old visiting my grandma in Dennisport, MA. I decided I could take out the inflatable boat into the ocean by myself. I was rowing like mad, but still the beach kept getting further and further away. I was in over my head, and luckily a guy in a motor came by to rescue me! We probably all have stories to share of getting in over our heads and needing rescue as kids, but its much harder to come up with examples as adults. Why is that? Do we still get in over our heads as adults but are embarassed to admit it? Do we simply learn to avoid risk and play it safe? Well today's scripture readings suggest that getting in over our heads and needing rescue is not just for kids, it's a life long thing. And we should be much less fearful of being lost and overwhelmed, because we have a God who comes to the rescue, that is who God is.

You could start by opening up to any Psalms to see this foremost trait of who God is: 'In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.' Getting in over our heads and needing rescue apparently is not just for kids, apparently its also for great Kings like David who wrote the Psalms. It also should be key for us, and crucial times but also every day. Is that perhaps why the closing line of our most important daily prayer is, 'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us (rescue us) from evil.' So maybe we are supposed to be bold in doing good and living our lives, because if you don't risk climbing the mountain you won't enjoy the view. If we don't risk getting in over our heads, we will never be rescued, and meet our rescuer.

Jesus' whole life, his whole being was as rescuer; of the lost, the paralyzed, the sick and the sinners. It's in today's Gospel reading. The disciples are caught in a terrible storm at sea, and their boat was sinking. Their hearts sank, their life flashed before their eyes, when all the sudden Jesus comes forth to rescue them. This miraculous rescue of Jesus should not be too surprising, given that this role is his very name. Jesus, Iêsous comes from the Hebrew Yeshua, which means God rescues, God saves. Jesus' very name is his function in God's million year Divine plan; God rescues.

So this is great theory and great theology; but we don't live in the time of Jesus. Is the God who saves still relevant after Jesus bodily left this world, even today? Well St. Paul in our second reading is a key link to our God who saves. Like us, he never met Jesus in person. Yet his experience, through and through, was with the Christ who rescues, an experience calling to us even today. To paraphrase, Paul says to his parishioners in Corinth, 'we don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this violence came down on us for preaching in Asia. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to live; we were in over our heads. But as it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally—the God who rescues, who raises the dead! And he did it, and he'll do it again, rescuing us as many times as we need rescuing. (2 Cor 8:10 MSG)

There's the good news, the great news for all of us who tend to get in over our heads. We who climb up too high and can't come down. We who seek to follow Christ, but our actions fall short We who strive to be good but are weighed down by sin. God's message today for us is to keep climbing, keep seeking, keep striving; don't be afraid to live and to love. For I am the God who saves, you can trust me. I am the God who shows up in the nick of time for those who seek me. And let us all remember that we too are called to an active role in God's rescue plans, through our prayers and deeds. For when we have learned to be rescued by God, over and again in our lives, we learn to come alongside others who find themselves in over their heads. It's what we do as followers of Jesus. It is in our very names, in our callings to be special agents in God's ongoing rescue plan, which never ceases, never despairs, never dies until all are gathered safely into his eternal care, now and always amen.