

Finding Hope in Hard Times

One of the Bible stories that I turn to time and time again is that of Jesus and the disciples caught in a storm in the middle of the night as they are sailing across the sea. They ask Jesus, “don’t you care that we are perishing?” And Jesus calms the sea, saying, “Peace. Be still.” (Mark 4:35-41). There are all kinds of storms in our lives – things that seem uncontrollable, bigger than we are, and that bring chaos and fear into our lives.

We live in a culture in which what we do for a living is one of the main things that defines who we are. When we lose a job, we don’t just lose the income and all of the things we use that money for. The same is true of losing a home or some other valued possession. We are trained to understand worth and value by what we do, and by what we have. When we lose something valuable, we also lose the meaning we attach to it: a sense of accomplishment, security, or peace. Losing something we value is a grieving process: we are forced to give up some of our dreams and imagine ourselves and our lives in new ways.

Finding hope starts with confronting what we’ve lost, which can be a difficult process. Confusion, disbelief, shame, inertia, and anger (including anger towards God) are all typical responses to loss. As much as we may want to be strong and deal with things ourselves, find someone else to talk to – a friend, a counselor, a priest or pastor – anyone who will truly listen, and not join in the complaining or pretend the storm isn’t there.

Finding hope amidst loss means that we adjust who and what we value, and focus on the good things we have. What is it that really makes you happy? What are you good at? How can you help others who are struggling in these difficult days? How might your change in circumstances be an opportunity to un-clutter your life and focus on the people that are most important to you?

For those of us who have more than we truly need, we might ask: How can I help those who are struggling? What can I give up, not because I have to, but because being part of a community is about sharing our abundance so that others can live with dignity? What can we do to help bring calm and peace amidst the chaos of life in today’s world?

It’s been said that “sometimes the Lord calms the storm. Sometimes the Lord lets the storm rage, and calms his child.” We may not be able to control the storm, but we can calm ourselves and bring peace to others by sharing what we have, by focusing on what we truly value, and by finding others who will share the journey with us.