

***Reflection on Matthew 14:22-33***  
***August 9, 2020***

Jack Kornfield, a teacher of Buddhist mindfulness, tells this story about the violinist, Itzhak Perlman.

Perlman contracted polio when he was four years old. Since then he has walked with crutches and leg braces.

Perlman was playing a concert in New York at Avery Fisher Hall. He walked to the chair set for him on the stage, sat down and removed his leg braces. Then the concert began.

They were about half-way through one selection when a string broke on Perlman's violin. It made a distinctive twang as it broke. The orchestra stopped playing. Everyone realized Perlman could not continue playing the piece as written.

Perlman closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and motioned to the conductor to begin the piece again.

Perlman played the rest of the piece on three strings, spontaneously adjusting his playing and his fingering. When the piece was finished, there was an awed silence, followed by a standing ovation.

Perlman wiped sweat from his brow, then signaled for silence.

He then said, "You know, sometimes it's your task in life to find out how much music you can make with what you have left."

Sometimes our task in life is to find out how much music we can make with what we have left.

How much music we can make when we have only three strings on a violin, or when we cannot move without experiencing pain, or we cannot see or hear as once we did, or when we can't have the career we want, or when a medical diagnosis places a new limit to our years of life.

What music can we make – what life can we express, what love and compassion can we share, what friendship can we offer, what blessings can we bestow, what courage can we embody, what faith can we bequeath?

I think today's scripture reading can be read as a story of Peter hearing the twang of one of his faith's chords snapping.

After the feeding of thousands in the wilderness, Jesus tells his disciples to get in a boat and depart from the shore without him.

After everyone has left, Jesus ascends a nearby mountain in order to pray.

Evening comes. A strong wind sweeps across the lake. High waves batter the boat. Unable to get back to shore, the disciples spend the night straining to keep the boat afloat and to prevent it from being swept further into the lake.

Night begins to yield to morning. Suddenly they see 'something' moving across the lake, something that appears to be a human being. They are frightened. They shout that it must be a ghost. As soon as they shout, the 'something' speaks to them, telling them that it is no ghost, it is Jesus and telling them "do not be afraid."

Peter is the first to respond, saying, "If it is you, Jesus, command me to come to you on the water." IF IT IS YOU, allow 'me' to walk on water.

Jesus tells Peter to come, so Peter leaves his friends in the boat, in the storm, and starts walking to Jesus – walking across the water. But then he feels the wind buffeting him, the waves undulating under his feet, and fear rises within him, and he begins to sink. He calls out for Jesus to save him. Jesus reaches for him, pulls him up, and says, "You of little faith...why did you doubt?" Then they both get into the boat, and suddenly the wind ceases and all is calm on the lake.

But probably not so calm inside Peter. He sits, soaked, shivering, wondering what has just happened. Jesus told them to get into the boat then let them face the storm alone throughout the night. Jesus told him to get out of the boat and walk on the water, but Jesus didn't prevent Peter from starting to sink. Jesus had said that he, Peter, had "little faith."

What was left for Peter? What kind of disciple was he when even Jesus questioned his faith?

Yet, this Peter would be the rock, the foundation, upon whom, Jesus said, the church community would be built.

Perhaps on that lake, Peter discovered that in sinking we discover the depths of God's love; that God is present in both life's heights and in life's depths; that resurrection comes only after both birth and death; that in relinquishing our expectation of God sheltering us from all storms we discover God with us in all storms; that when we surrender our need for the reward of God's love, we receive the gift of God's love.

When we find ourselves in the midst of storm, sinking where once we were secure – coping perhaps with grief, depression, addiction, the unravelling of a dream... then, like Peter, may we discover that even in those times and places God is somehow with us, that Christ comes to us even though we do not recognize the approaching figure as the Christ, that we are held in a profound love, and we can make music...the music of those who pray in the midst of storms, the music of those who reach out to hold onto others, the music of those who reach out to be held by God, the music of a rock that sinks enough to become the foundation of God's beloved community, the music of a little faith that trusts enough to walk through the storm towards the one bearing God's love, the music of a little faith that turns out to be just enough faith to help change the world.

We can discover and play the music of God's love, deeper than any depths, the music that comes in finding life despite losing life, the music we make when we trust that what we have left is left in the amazing grace of God. AMEN