

Jesus decides to visit the earth together with Moses. Of course he wanted to amaze the people and starts walking over the nearest lake. He takes his first steps, but sinks. Surprised, he tries it again and surely enough, sinks again. Confused, he asks Moses: "Strange, last time I was here I could walk on water" Moses answers: "Well last time you didn't have holes in your feet." This week we continue in the gospel of Matthew with the story of Jesus walking on water and calming the sea. It's an iconic story known even by non-Christians, and part of popular culture. It has been interpreted in so many ways. This week, I wonder if we might consider it from the perspective of Jesus as one who has a deep connection with his own soul and exemplifies a way of taking care of one's soul. Let's take a look at the scene, particularly in relation to the story we have about Elijah hearing the voice of God in the stillness.

Jesus has gone off after feeding the crowd, after learning his cousin John has been brutally executed by the local governor. He wants to be alone and pray. When he is done, he wants to meet up with his friends. As Jesus walks over the water, he is a figure reminiscent of the Spirit of God who moves over the deep in Genesis and brings order out of chaos. The language of Matthew refers to Jesus as *I Am* like we see in Exodus and, of course, at the end of the episode, the disciples worship him. Peter wants to be part of this power and is invited into it. When he doubts, Peter falls into the sea. It is faith in Jesus, in the power of God that calms Peter and losing sight of this brings him back to a state of panic – to a wind-tossed sea.

How do we stay focused? How do we find comfort and solace in God's presence even in the midst of life's stormy and chaotic seas? Jesus prays alone in nature a number of times in the gospels. Do you like to commune with nature? Do you like to find time alone to pray? Jesus has to stay focused on his ministry or it will all fall apart. Even Satan tries to get him off course. But Jesus seems to have a clear sense of who and what he is all about and when things get rough, he takes care of himself so he can stay focused – so that he can bring order when things get too chaotic.

So much has been said of late about caring for ourselves. Quarantining, experiencing a pandemic, the protests against racism and police brutality, wrestling with questions about schools reopening and caring for loved ones as we also try to go about our business. High unemployment. Add to all this, in our area, the power outages. It would be quite normal for anyone to live in a heightened state of anxiety right now and need to consider what it looks like to care for ourselves. How do we keep our heads screwed on straight. How do we keep from having a short fuse, or panicking at the challenges all around us? It is not only a worthwhile question but an essential one. After all, we should notice when we have holes in our feet.

We might call this caring for the soul. In Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*, he writes: *Care of the soul begins with careful observance of how the soul manifests itself and how it operates. Observance is a word from ritual and religion. The 'serv' in observance originally referred to tending sheep. Observing the soul we keep an eye on its sheep, on whatever is wandering and grazing – the latest addiction, a striking dream, or a troubling mood.* Jesus demonstrates an understanding of this when he decides to go away on his own. We have to be intentional about observing our soul. I appreciate Moore's examples of a troubling mood, a dream, and a new

addiction. We can observe the soul by simply paying attention to our everyday lives. It's not magic and we don't necessarily need to sit in the lotus position with incense burning. Our actions, moods, and dreams are clues. So, first, if we want to care for ourselves in these troubling times, or any time, we have to practice observing the soul.

Some have disparaged this idea. They believe it's selfish. After all, if Christianity is about being in the service of others, we should be outwardly focused. But the idea of self-care isn't narcissism. It springs from an awareness that we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. So the second part of the statement is the first part of the process. Loving oneself. Lots of us think we do. After all, who would imagine we wouldn't love our own self. But we don't really. We can neglect our physical health, mental health, emotional wellbeing, and even forget to pay attention to our soul. If we did this to a dog, the ASPCA would take it away and give it to an owner that did actually love it. Returning to Moore's comment, part of self-care requires an intentionality of paying attention to what's going on with us. Are we acting more prickly, do we get tired, what really brings us joy? If we love others, we want to give them the best version of ourselves that we can. That's a big part of what self-care is all about.

Today, the Lord's Day, would be a great day to rest and pay attention to what's going on with you, for each of us. This is the Sabbath, a day of rest intended to be just for us. We think it's for God, and hopefully we believe that part of having a day for ourselves includes some time with God, but the Sabbath is intended as a gift from God to everyone. Today is a great day to receive this gift and open it up and really have the wonderful experience of paying attention to ourselves. Then, we might imagine what course of action will help us get back on track or calm the storm. Do we need to go for a hike, spend time in prayer, write in a journal, or play some games with some fun people. The other part of self-care or caring for our soul is experiencing the things that bring us life or joy, or a sense of fulfillment. Deep within, not immediate gratification, although, if you need some ice cream to get back on track, you should make that happen. But we should know ourselves well enough to know what brings us true joy and satisfaction and how to get it.

All of this is a process of making ourselves aware so that we can bring ourselves back to a place of equilibrium, back to the place where God created us to be, which will enable us to be our best selves for others, which, I hope is also a part of self-care or caring for our souls, because who doesn't feel right when we know we have made someone else smile, or solve a problem, or just enjoy their day...

Seas will rage and storms will come. Pandemics will continue and the world will keep on turning. But the good news is that God is in the midst of all of it and we are never alone. Jesus understood this and through his good example we can stay calm and carry on seeing God at work around us, experiencing the wonders and joys of creation, living life as we love our neighbors as we love our selves...