

**Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7) – Year B – June 24, 2009 – Homily**  
**1 Samuel 17:1a, 4-11, 19-23, 32-49; Psalm 9:9-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

When Steve and I were in our late teens and early twenties we got into the habit of supporting a local band called The Four Beats. They played mostly songs by The Doors; upbeat, funky, and ideal for a pub setting, where loud was the order of the evening. One of their earliest records was the fast-paced *Break on Through (To the Other Side)*, which despite its only modest showing on the charts is still a signature piece of the band's work. The lyrics are mostly a thinly veiled description of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, but the choice of words is really quite fascinating. Here's a few lines: "You know the day destroys the night, Night divides the day / Tried to run, tried to hide, / Break on through to the other side," and "The gate is straight, deep and wide, / Break on through to the other side...."

Tonight's Gospel reading from Mark finds Jesus and the disciples doing their own crossing to the other side. It tells of a sleepy Jesus, and a set of very frightened disciples. The most obvious message is the continuing growth of the disciples from fear towards faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus amply demonstrates his power and authority by calming the storm that is endangering all the occupants of the boat. Yet this evening, I would like to suggest that we look at crossings: where we are, where we are headed, or where we have just arrived. In other words, what crossings are we in the process of preparing for, in the middle of, or ones that we have just successfully navigated?

As a community we have just successfully completed our first year of ministry together, having moved through the inevitably choppy waters of a change in pastoral leadership. As we heard on Sunday, change isn't always easy or smooth, but it is about relationship. Prayer played a central role in this community's discernment process in order to articulate what kind of pastor you were looking for, and who might be the best fit for the call here. Prayer was also vital to the necessity to the community's work of healing and reconciliation. Again these are highly relational issues. So now what? The vestry and I have been working hard on discerning God's will for this place, and planning for our future. For example, after a highly successful Vacation Bible School, we know that there are families with children out there! What might we do to prepare the way to welcome all of Christ's Body, children of all ages, more fully into our midst? It is truly a challenge, one that rocks the boat of a community that has become used to a rather more homogenous age range. What will Jesus do to calm the storm and grant us all peace of mind during this period of healthy transition and growth? And what is waiting for us on the other side?

Prayer is always fundamental to our personal discernment and spiritual growth as well. How can we know God more deeply if we are not prepared to enter into conversation through prayer? Our most important preparation for all the times of our lives is prayer. Whether we are more comfortable with written prayers or extemporaneous ones, to coin a phrase, we all need to "just do it". Prayer keeps us grounded. And if you have any doubt that this is important in life, consider what happens to buildings that don't have a lightening rod to discharge the powerful electric force into the ground when the storm comes. On a personal note, I would not be a priest today if it weren't for the power of prayer; and I would not be a remotely sane priest today without prayer! One of the best prayers I know is "Help me, God." As my friend, Claire, told me years ago – prayer changes us, and I can attest to that. What I would add though is that prayer changes us for the better, because it aligns our will with God's will for our lives, and because it

takes us out of ourselves when we pray for others.

Where else might the Lord be taking us in the boat tonight, or do we sometimes feel that we are purely at the mercy of the wind and waves of life? The Doors' song has a handy allusion to the Book of Genesis, "day destroys the night. Night divides the day." In the story of creation, the sea is pure chaos and God brings all to order by His Word. In the Gospel passage – the sea is terrifying and life-threatening, and Jesus brings calm and order to it in perfect faith by His word of command. God creates the heaven and the earth, dividing the day from the night. The light of our lives, and the Light of the world, is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the ministry of the disciples of Jesus to continue His work of bringing order to the chaotic mess that our sins have brought into the world. Whatever else we are called to do or be in Christ's service, each and every one of us is, by virtue of our Baptism, a minister of God's Word to the world. Now that sounds huge, but the good news is that God has ministers literally all over the world, and so our world can be as near as our family, or next door neighbors. And that is not to say that God does not call some of us to the work of mission in the farthest corners of the earth. God desires that we bring the message of eternal life and healing to others. Does that thought leave us quaking in fear? Or are we willing to break through to the other side of fear? What and who are waiting for us on that distant shore? A new-found spiritual gift or a new friend? What about Jesus beckoning us forward into new territory, spiritual growth, and increased joy in the Lord?

"The gate is straight, deep and wide" sings Jim Morrison of The Doors. And that is true if we wish to live by our own rules and standards, which frankly are pretty low and undemanding – the kind of anything goes message of the world. The discipline of intentional Christian living leads us through the narrow gate. Yet I have come to understand that crossing the threshold of the gate does not just take a single simple action, like accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior. That is important, but only the beginning of a lifelong process of conversion, submission and transformation: a lifelong crossing over and letting go of our old self, to become someone new in Christ. Our metaphorical gate is as much a passageway to break on over to the other side, as is the boat trip of Jesus and His disciples. That trip began the process of confirming Jesus' authority and power as God's Son and our Savior; moved the Israelites from insular religiosity to truly being a Light to the nations; and began to reveal that God's gift of salvation is for the whole world – Jew and Gentile alike.

Where is God calling you and me to cross over or break through to the other side? How will God get you and me from here to there? Will we take a giant leap of faith, or have to row persistently through stormy weather to make the journey? What storms will God calm – inner ones or outer ones – in order to facilitate our transition of growth? One thing is for sure, we cannot move onward, learn, or grow without faith and trust in God, or without our greatest weapon -- that is the power of prayer.

Amen.