

## A Mental Health Sermon: Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John: 3/10/2018

This sermon will focus on the Greek word *peran*, translated crossing over, other side, went over. All four Gospels use the word *peran* in reference to Jesus and the disciples crossing over during a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee. The other side becomes a revelation point for deeper meaning as the storm and crossing over serve as a pattern.

The repetition of the word *peran* appears four times in a short space in the early verses of Chapter 6 of John's Gospel (1-26). English dilutes the impact with three different translations for the same word. The meaning and use of *peran* alone makes a visual difference. The repetition impacts with other words in this chapter: fear, food, receive, and belief.

Today I am looking at the big picture in this chapter as it relates to our everyday life. The depths of the chapter connect with the depths of our lives.

The feeding story preceding the storm introduced by *peran* in verse 1, moves to receiving Christ, I am the bread of life. The food of daily life becomes the introduction to receiving the food of Christ Presence, flesh and blood, in transcendent language. Many followers have no stomach for this kind of identification in the words of Jesus as the Word. The storm on the lake is now a storm in the crowd as they murmur and depart. They are unable to get beyond a literal language, the same issue for Nicodemus in Chapter 3 of the Gospel.

The storm reaches the 12, and Jesus says, will you leave too. Peter speaking for the group. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (6:68) In an instant Peter is on the other side with his confession. Belief. A Belief in receiving Christ who is the food for Eternal Life.

The storm during the crossing becomes a metaphor for the future storms. The **Big clue** for this continuous is when Jesus appears walking on the water as the boat is about to be swamped. The disciples register fear. They have a phobic reaction. That's the Greek word. Phobic Jesus recognizing their fear says fear not. Do not be phobic. However, we have a different Greek verb form providing an Aha!. Fear not continuously. Fear not in

every moment, with each life storm, with each crossing over. A Present imperative verb. It doesn't exist in English. We miss the meaning. **Fear not continuously.** This is not a one time command, its an ongoing command, for each new moment we face fear.

This is our lives. We have a new place to apply the Chinese word for crisis, meaning both danger and opportunity. Fear on the one hand and the other, the other side, both here and not here. Peter and the disciples are never the same again. And neither are we. Transformation is our destiny. We are destined to be new creatures and a new creation in Christ. Here in this chapter we witness the pain and resistance to transformation. Metanoia, repentance, experiencing conversion, coming to a new mind generates fear, murmuring, denial, resistance, many ways to leave the life long process of transformation and renewal.

The Trinity Cathedral structure is made for peran in all four Gospels, our crossing over and receiving Christ during the storms and transitions in our lives. Look at the ceiling and you see the wood framing the bottom of a ship. The nave is the name for where the congregation sits. Nave and navy connect in Latin. We have the imagery of water. As figurative we are on lake Galilee every time we are here, crossing over in both calm and turbulent times. The Altar, our food table, is where we prepare to receive the presence of Christ anew for crossing over continuously.

My own story is continuously nourished here. I encountered a huge storm with wind and waves when my son Matthew had a bipolar episode causing a disturbance. He was arrested and jailed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. The jail isn't equipped to handle mental illness even though that is what happened. Punishment to counter behavior is their mode. With the defunding and deinstitutionalizing of mental illness jails and prisons are now major mental illness centers. Learning how to navigate the jail, the court house, the criminal justice system provided a steep learning curve, I was fearful for Matthew's future and forced to face my inner feelings. We received good news came in early October. He was a possible candidate for the Mental Health Court. The court is a two year program where participants are held to different levels of achievement and monitored for compliance. The sentences can then be reduced or dismissed.

Finding a long term mental health bed in Judicial District 7 took 4 ½ months. Last week we crossed over to the Andrew Jackson care center

near Bellevue, Iowa. Another aspect of our broken mental health system in having a lengthy wait for a long term bed.

As we move to the other side I have become a member of the Mental Health Court Board. My mission is to Increase awareness of this pilot program and the injustices in our mental health system. Cathedral members are supportive. I am grateful. The court is now part of the Outreach ministry. Members are coming on Fridays to observe the court in session. Seeing the court in action, seeing lives change is the best way .

The issue of mental illness is with us as a nation, one in five have a mental illness. We have the issue in our state, our county jails, right here in river city. At the same time, simultaneously, I connect this issue with the footprints of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel in our Eucharistic prayer yet to be said in the liturgy. When you read and hear this in the liturgy say **Chapter 6** to yourself.

“And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that we, and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily **receive** the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him.”

We have crossed over, we are on the other side, We are with Peter, “we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”