

Crossing Over
A Sermon
By Rev. Michael E. Ferrell

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Mark 4:35

The Lord had been teaching the people all day. Later in the evening He said to His disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side” (Mark 4:35). The evening signaled the end of the day. The Word of the Heavenly Doctrine says that “in the evening” means “the end of the former state and the beginning of a new one” (AC 7896). At the time the Lord was in the world, the church within people was nearing its end. The Lord came to collect remnants from the declining church and gather them together with people outside the church so that He could build a new church, the Christian Church.

In respect to a person, the evening state that ends, after receiving truths from the Word of the Lord, is a sinful life from either ignorance or deliberate choices. The new state that can begin is a new life grounded in goodness according to the Lord’s commandments. As we prepare to celebrate the Lord’s coming into the world consider that the Lord said to His twelve disciples and even people today: “Let us cross over to the other side.”

The Arcana Coelestia teaches that the twelve disciples represent in the complex “all things of faith [which is belief in the Lord] and of love” [which is charity toward the neighbor] (AC 10087:2). Faith and love are not simply abstractions but are qualities that make us human. We are truly human when we live according to the Lord’s Word as He prepares us to live in heaven as angels. We are truly human when our belief in the Lord’s coming influences us to perform heavenly uses in service to the church and our friends and neighbors.

As we enter the season in celebration of the Lord’s Advent, let’s leave behind ideas about life that we know are false. Let’s leave behind bad attitudes and behaviors that injure others. Instead, let’s cherish the faith we have from the Lord and treasure His love within us and cross over to the other side. The other side can be described as the heavenly life that we live, from the Lord, so He may bring us into His kingdom of heaven.

The disciples obeyed the Lord’s command to travel across the sea. This is a simple image to visualize. The Lord and His twelve disciples are at the seashore. They get into a boat. Then they begin their journey across the sea. We can learn from the Apocalypse Explained that a boat stands for “doctrine [or the basic, fundamental tenets of truth] from the Word” (AE 600:7).

In the disciples we may see an image of our own obedience to the Lord. We gather together all the things of faith and love we’ve learned from the Lord’s Word and then allow them to shape our doctrine. The Lord’s message is simple. Take all the things of faith and love that you have from Him and place them into your boat or, in other words,

allow these (faith and love) to form your doctrine. Then it is in reliance upon your faith and commitment to a useful life that you are able to cross over to the other side.

Our boat is our doctrine gathered from the truths in the Lord's Word. By means of doctrine from the Word we know how to cross over to the other side; we know how we must live. But then we see in our lesson that soon after the Lord and His disciples got into the boat, "a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling" (Mark 4: 37). We turn to the Heavenly Doctrine to shed light upon the disciples' predicament.

We're told in the Apocalypse Explained that the storm that arose represents spiritual temptations; these are false ideas from the hells "breaking into the thoughts, which is the source of remorse of conscience and grief of mind" (AE 419:23). The reality is we will encounter challenges and adversity that beat against our commitment to the Lord and one another. As a person commits to the heavenly life, evil spirits from the hells remind him of his past sins and even attempt to exaggerate his past misdeeds.

No one should, by engaging in spiritual judgment, condemn himself to hell. But at the same time no one should excuse or justify any sin. However, as long as a person allows the Lord to reform and regenerate his life, a person's sins can be forgiven. But the hells will exploit a person's guilty conscience and induce sadness, grief, and despair. The attack of the hells can be like a raging storm. Meanwhile, where is the Lord?

While the windstorm arose and the waves beat into the boat, the Lord was in the stern of the boat asleep on a pillow. But soon the boat would fill with water and eventually sink and the disciples would drown in the sea. This was a terrible storm. The disciples were afraid that they would lose their life. It is interesting that some of the disciples were fishermen. They were experienced with sailing. We may conclude that they had previously survived storms on the seas.

This storm speaks of spiritual realities about our souls. We have all experienced some difficulty or another in coping with everyday life. As the disciples may have previously encountered storms on the sea, so have we struggled against temptation. We have all battled against false ideas, a guilty conscience, or grief that can disturb our peace of mind. Even so, who among us has not at any time lost sight of the truth that the Lord is forever present and fights for us and with us against temptations.

The Lord was in the stern of the boat asleep on a pillow. While it appears the Lord sleeps the truth is He never sleeps. The Lord's Word in the Psalms of David tells us that "behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:5). While it appears the Lord leaves us without any protection and sleeps, in reality He leaves us in freedom.

In His Divine Providence the Lord protects us and forever leads and guides our footsteps. Yet He leaves us in freedom to choose our own path. The hope is we will make good choices and choose the path of righteousness. Whatever choices we've made, good or

bad, the Lord in His providence ever so gently leads us. But we can only look back and see the Lord's guidance.

The Heavenly Doctrine speaks of seeing the appearance of the Lord's Providence: "to see the Divine Providence in the back and not in the face is to see it after it operates and not before. All who acknowledge the Divine Providence, when they see events in some wonderful series, see the Divine Providence, as it were, from an interior acknowledgment and confess it" (DP 187).

But the disciples failed to acknowledge the Lord's protection. They were overwhelmingly concerned about the storm. Threatened with possibly drowning in the sea the disciples awoke the Lord saying, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4: 38). How often have we been in one situation or another, like the disciples, believing the Lord does not care? If the Lord cared perhaps people would not experience agony or discomfort. Human nature seems to have a low tolerance for physical, emotional or spiritual pain. No matter how vehemently the storms may rage the Lord has all power.

As we approach celebration of the Lord's coming into the world we must remember that the Lord is taking us to the other side. He is leading us to His kingdom of heaven. In our first lesson we see that the Lord rose up Moses who would eventually lead the people across the Red Sea. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord caused an east wind that blew all night and the waters were divided. Then the children of Israel crossed to the other side of the Red Sea on dry ground. Pursuing the children of Israel, the Egyptians entered the sea. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the waters returned and covered the army of the Egyptians who drowned in the sea.

During ancient times people lived in a world of love and peace. Everyone lived in harmony within their families and communities. Love of the Lord and the neighbor thrived abundantly within the hearts and minds and life of people.

But people began to turn away from the Lord. The nature of sin committed by bad people reached unbearable levels. After death, good and bad people continued living in the spiritual world. As they did so, the Lord started gathering together good people for heaven. Then the Lord executed a judgment, raising good people to what would become the inmost or third heaven and permitting the evil to flee into the hells. The story of the flood, in its internal sense, speaks of these events.

The Lord foresaw that people would again degenerate to a state of damnation. He foresaw that the only way to remove hell from people would be to come into the world Himself and bring about redemption. From the flood to the Lord's coming into the world good and evil people, after their death, inhabited the region in the spiritual world that would eventually become the second or spiritual heaven.

The Lord preserved good people in what the Heavenly Doctrine describes as "the lower earth." The Word of the Arcana tells us that before the Lord came into the world, heaven

was not arranged into three heavens, an inmost (third), middle (second) and ultimate (first), but was one (AC 8054:2). The region of heaven that would eventually become the spiritual heaven was occupied by people in evils and falsities (AC 8054:2).

The crossing of the Red Sea speaks of the Lord raising spiritual people out of the lower earth and leading them through the hells of evils and falsities that accumulated in the spiritual world (AC 8099). We're taught that "the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground" (Exodus 14:22) meaning that people of the spiritual church entered the hells and passed through safely (AC 8205, AC 8234).

And now we return to the Gospel of Mark. Visualize the Lord standing in the boat as the windstorm arose tossing the boat up and down and side to side as it filled with water. Facing the storm, the Lord said, "Peace, be still." The winds ceased and there was a great calm. Then it was peaceful and quiet again on the sea. The Lord is now in the world continuing His quest to save mankind. In the True Christian Religion the Word teaches that "the Lord's subjugation of hell is meant by His calming the sea by saying: "Peace, be still" (TCR 123).

Crossing the Red Sea represents the passage of spiritual people through the hells after the Lord raised these people from the lower earth. Calming the storm speaks of the Lord subjugating the hells. But there's much more, particularly at the Lord's resurrection. The Gospel of Matthew says "The graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27: 52-53).

The Lord crossed over to the other side, into the world to save and redeem angels and people. This is what we celebrate during the season of Advent. Graves were opened. Sleeping people awoke from their slumber. They went into the holy city, Jerusalem where they were seen by many. The Heavenly Doctrine, in describing this wonderful miracle, teaches us that at the Lord's resurrection He liberated people who were of the spiritual church; He descended into the lower regions, raised them out of the tombs [the graves were opened] and introduced them into heaven [they went into the holy city] (AC 8018).

We are beginning our celebration of the Lord's coming into the world. The Lord crossed over to the other side. He came into the world. By means of the Human that He assumed in the world He descended so He could redeem angels and people. He executed judgment in the world of spirits, allowed the evil to flee away into the hells, raised good people into heaven, created the second or spiritual heaven, and established a new church, the Christian Church. The Lord reduced all things to order.

The Lord has promised, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14: 2). So, "let us cross over to the other side." The Lord says "come, for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17).

Amen.

1st Lesson: Exodus 14: 21 - 31

21. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. 25. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians." 26. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." 27. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. 29. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30. So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

2nd Lesson: Mark 4: 35 - 41

35. On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." 36. Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And the other little boats were also with Him. 37. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39. Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still." And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. 40. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" 41. And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

3rd Lesson: True Christian Religion 95

It is said and believed in Christian churches at this day that the Lord alone has merit and righteousness through the obedience which He rendered to God the Father while in the world, and especially through the passion of the cross. But it is asserted that the essential act of redemption was the passion of the cross. This, however, was not an act of redemption, but an act of the glorification of His Human....The acts of redemption whereby the Lord made Himself righteous were as follows: He executed the final

judgment, which took place in the spiritual world; at that time He separated the evil from the good and the goats from the sheep; He expelled from heaven those who made one with the beasts of the dragon; He formed out of the worthy a new heaven, and out of the unworthy a hell; in both heaven and hell He gradually restored all things to order; and to crown all, He established a new church. These acts were the acts of redemption whereby the Lord made Himself righteous. For righteousness is doing all things in accordance with Divine order, and restoring to order whatever has fallen from order; since righteousness is Divine order itself.