

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. Then disaster struck. The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in. The bird's owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum cleaner, and tore open the bag inside. There was Chippie - still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust, hair and all the stuff you find in a dust bag, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the tap, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted her pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, a friend who had heard about Chippie's troubles contacted his owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore - he just sits and stares." Who can blame him? Sucked in, washed up, and blown about - That's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

Things happen in our lives that come along unexpectedly and we end up feeling a bit like Chippie - sucked in, washed up, and blown about— the song stolen from our heart. In fact, I suspect more than a few folk here could stand up and give testimony to some aspect of their lives where they felt a bit like the disciples in that boat -

afraid, vulnerable, a decidedly sinking feeling! You know what it's like to feel as though you are in the middle of a storm, tossed this way and that, and wondering how you're ever going to get to calmer waters.

But it doesn't even have to be what others recognize as a huge disaster. One time a mother walked in on her 6 year old son who was sobbing. "What's the matter?" she asked. "I've just figured out how to tie my shoes." "Well, honey, that's wonderful. You're growing up. But why are you crying?" "Because," he said, "now, now I'll have to do it every day for the rest of my life." Just simple change can be difficult for us all at times.

Everyone will have some rough times, storms that challenge us, throw us off course and even scare the living daylight out of us. Just like the disciples, God does not promise us a peaceful voyage. God does promise, however, that He will always be present.

We are not told that Jesus commanded the wind and the waves with masterful gestures or a great, loud voice. For all we know from the text, he just quietly told the elements to behave themselves. This makes sense, because people who truly have power don't need to flaunt it. God may not answer our request with urgency and fireworks, but that does not mean that His answer doesn't come. Don't expect a battalion of angels to rescue you! Don't expect the heavens to open up and a deep voice to comfort you! God's rescue often comes in a quiet way; sometimes so gently that those of us who are hard to teach might look back on God's rescues and decide that we were saved by something else instead: coincidence, kindness, or our own ability.

I suppose the disciples could have shrugged the whole storm episode off a few weeks later as a coincidence, but they learned to have faith. Don't make that mistake of thinking God doesn't care so God won't have to repeat the lesson.

Don't overlook that fact that God also works through other people to care for us in the midst of difficult times. A young man applied for a job as a farmhand. When the farmer asked for his qualifications, he said, "I can sleep when the wind blows." This puzzled the farmer. But he liked the young man, and hired him. A few days later, the farmer and his wife were awakened in the night by a violent storm. They quickly began to check things out to see if all was secure. They found that the shutters of the farmhouse had been securely fastened. A good supply of logs had been set next to the fireplace. Meanwhile, the young man slept soundly.

The farmer and his wife then inspected their property. They found that the farm tools had been placed in the storage shed, safe from the elements. The tractor had been moved into the garage. The barn was properly locked. Even the animals were calm. All was well. The farmer then understood the meaning of the young man's words, "I can sleep when the wind blows." Because the farmhand did his work loyally and faithfully when the skies were clear, he was prepared for the storm when it broke. God wants us to rely on others when there is turmoil, especially to those who are faithful.

So the first thing to remember from today's gospel is that we aren't alone, the lord travels with us on the journey of life. He doesn't send the storms but he does care about how we handle them.

Second, Jesus does not promise to calm every storm in your life. Jesus does promise to calm you in every storm of life.

And finally, I was in the Air Force, not the Navy but I still know that having the wind stop is a bad thing for sail boats. It means that the disciples were safe but now they had to row to the other shore.

Even the presence of Christ, even the event of a great miracle may still mean a lot of hard work on our part to get where Christ wants us to go. While we may pray that Jesus would work miracles in our lives and in our world and in our neighborhoods, the miracles that come probably won't let us off the hook from doing some of the hard work required to do what Jesus has called us to do.

So don't end up like Chippie the parakeet, silent and dazed. Be alert to and thankful for the grace that God is sending you. He does care and he will help.