

Coastal settlements and fishing

A shore line is a margin, a place of transition. Here, land meets water and the people of the land come to fish the creatures of the sea. Human beings have land as natural territory. The sea is unknown and full of dangers. To cross from one to the other requires nerve, need and faith.

The symbolism of this place of crossing, the threshold of banks and coasts, should not be missed in the Bible. The people of Israel crossed over from slavery to freedom, but God kept them safe on dry land all the way (Exodus 14;12ff). Jonah was delivered from the storm and the sea to his proper vocation in Nineveh, and Jesus points to this story as a sign for his generation (Luke 11: 29-32).

So too, Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, enters the waters of the Jordan and emerges on the other side: he has accepted his Father's will (eg Mark 1: 9-11). In Mark, this is almost immediately followed by the call to the disciples, at work in the margin of sea and land, fishing and mending nets (Mark 1:16-20). This is the dangerous territory where Jesus operates: men who risk all for fish shall risk all as fishers of men.



Jesus also teaches about God 'beside the sea' (cf Mark 2:13) or from a boat (Mark 3:9; 4:1) and a test of faith is a challenge to cross from boat into Jesus's saving hands (Matthew 14:28-32). In calming the storm, Jesus makes the boat as safe as the land, like the sea bed of the Red Sea for the Israelites: have faith and God is here.

It is not surprising then, that one of the wonderful resurrection appearances in John gives us the disciples' eye-view of Jesus on the shore cooking fish (21:4ff). For our home is 'over Jordan' where there is no more sea, though we must enter dark waters and hope to reach a farther shore. And our hope is to see, as the disciples did, the resurrected Jesus, offering us the absolute safety of God's love and our proper home.

