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Almost 20 years ago, I was in the midst of my “tertianship,” the last year of training one goes through as a Jesuit. I was living in Los Angeles and working at a high school in South Central LA which the Jesuits had taken over at the invitation of the Archbishop of LA. One weekend the Jesuit community of Loyola Marymount university invited the Jesuit tertians to spend Saturday afternoon at a beach house near the city which they owned. It was a beautiful Southern California day, and at about sundown I was swimming out in the ocean. The water was warm and nearby I could see a seal playing in the water. I was having a great time until the thought hit me: “How many times have you seen stories that began exactly like this on SHARK WEEK? That was enough to

get me out of the water before tragedy struck. But if I'd been Jesus or one of the Disciples, I might well have hung around in the surf long enough to have become a keto snack for some passing tiger shark because Jesus and his disciples probably never watched SHARK WEEK. In fact, for a nation located on the shore of the Mediterranean, ancient Judea was surprisingly suspicious of anything connected with the water. The only book of the Old Testament in which a sea voyage figures prominently is the Book of Jonah and JONAH is not exactly an episode of BELOW DECKS or even GILLIGAN'S ISLAND. Even in the Gospels, the stories of Jesus' followers who made their living on the Sea of Galilee, which was a large freshwater Lake, always seem to feature moments where the boat is in danger of sinking or Jesus has to rescue someone who has failed in an attempt to imitate him by walking on water, or some

other aquatic disaster. The ancient Hebrews had their own version of Hercules in a guy named Samson who, even though he wasn't exactly the sharpest rayon in the box, didn't let that stop him from bringing down the house when he appeared center stage at the Philistine temple of Dagon. But there's no Hebrew version of Ulysses or Sinbad, because the ancient Jews seem to have been quite convinced that if God had had meant them to venture out into the ocean he would have given them fins and gills. We see some that aquaphobia in today's Gospel which tells the story of what was just supposed to be just a "three hour tour" on the Sea of Galilee for Jesus and his merry band of hipsters. And Jesus does not initially seem to be very interested in helping to literally bail his friends out, because Mark says that even after "the weather started getting rough and their tiny ship was tossed,"

Jesus' initial reaction is to grab a nap. Fortunately, he does wake up in time to calm the storm and save the founders of Christianity from taking up residence in King David Jones' locker. Mark seems to be saying that whenever things get tough God will be there to calm the storm and prevent us from having featured roles in the next installment of SHARK WEEK. Now that seems like a hopeful message.

Unfortunately, Mark also says that Jesus is the one who gets them **into** trouble in the first place. According to Mark 4:36, this little night time boat ride isn't the Disciples' idea; it's Jesus'. None of his followers who had made their livings on this big lake suggest setting sail on it after dark. And when the big wind storm raises waves that threaten to swamp the boat, Jesus doesn't exactly spring into action. In fact, Mark says that he is asleep in the stern of the boat with his head on a pillow until the boat is

filled with water. It seems that even though Jesus could walk on water, David Hasselhoff might not have offered him any kind of signing bonus to become part of the BAYWATCH lifeguard squad.

Now, I can't speak for anyone else, but for myself, but I frequently feel as though I've spent the past ten years bailing, with one arm, on the S.S. Minnow, while Jesus has been busily catching 40 winks on the Lido deck. He certainly hasn't rebuked the storm that swept everything I used to enjoy in life overboard and into the waiting jaws of Moby Dick.

So maybe Mark is not trying to tell us in this story that God is going to rescue us from all our earthly troubles in the way that David Hasselhoff protected the endangered swim suit models of Malibu beach from motorcycle gangs, barracudas and roving Sharknados. That is certainly the message of the first reading

from the Book of Job. Job, as I think we all know suffers terribly though he's done nothing to deserve it. He loses his home, his possessions, his health and his children simply because, the book says, "Stuff happens." Job asks, "Why?" for about 40 chapters and in the end, as today's first reading says and as the American playwright and poet Archibald MacLeish puts it in his dramatization of Job's story, which he set in our modern world and called "J.B." : "God comes whirling in the wind replying What? That he knows more than Job? That God's more powerful than he?" God's answer to Job is majestic, soaring poetry, especially when its translated by all the great 16th Century English poets King James I hired to polish up the translation of the Bible that he sponsored," but it doesn't console Job and I'm not sure it would console any of us to know that God has the same power over the wind

and sea that Bram Stoker says Count Dracula has after that wind has torn through our lives like a cyclone through an Alabama trailer park. But maybe the storms that Matthew and the Book of Job are thinking about aren't the difficulties that face us in from the outside in our lives. Perhaps what Mark wants us to understand is that God does not only love us when we are as cool as David Hasselhoff, and are cutting through the waves like Diana Nyad, Michael Phelps or Mark Spitz. Even when we've messed things up as surely Gilligan managed to do every week on that show which my Mother forbade my little sisters and me to watch after school because she said it would rot our minds, God and Jesus are still willing to be seen with us. Even when we are less Buster Crabbe, the broad-shouldered Olympic medalist who became Flash Gordon swimming through the surf like a buttered shark in the

swamps of Ming the Merciless and we're more like Johnny Weissmuller, the beer bellied middle aged Tarzan poised to be pushed out of his own movies by the handsome young Bomba the Jungle Boy, God still is willing to give us a push when we need it to get out of the emotional and spiritual riptides we've swum ourselves into.

Samson spends a long time in the Philistines' dungeon wondering why Jehovah has nodded off on him, but even Samson—who fully deserves every bad thing that happens to him prays in the depths of his despair, "Please, Lord God, I beg you, remember me and strengthen me just one more time." And even if we may not have Samson's strength or his terrific hair or be able to bring down the house the way he does in the temple of Dagon, let's pray for the grace to have at least a fraction of his strength and his hope.