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Afloat

by Melanie Weidner

I heard a fairy tale once about a tiny person carried downstream in a little walnut boat to all sorts of adventures. The story details are gone, but the image of the walnut boat came back this summer for this painting of feeling afraid, called *Afloat*. I felt rattled and unsure after another car accident in June, and created this image as I wondered just how to trust God's presence when I didn't feel particularly safe. Turns out the spiritual life isn't a guarantee for safety, and so I lost another Subaru and entered some mild recovery.

I'm OK now, but it was a dark summer in many ways. It helped some to paint *Afloat*, to show just how scary big black waves and car wrecks feel. Today it could show just how scary economic crises and political fighting can feel. Worries come — our little walnut boats might be smashed any minute.



And yet . . . here's one truth about art, about life, about Love: there's always a bigger picture. We're always held by something More.

When I back up a little and look at the whole painting, I see the crashing waves as the ruffled feathers of a larger bird underneath. When I wonder what holds the boat up, I sense the calmer sea that Jesus knew was under the tossed waves on top. His disciples freaked out in the storms, but he remembered the possibility of peace and called it into being with trust and faith. I believe we all have access to this deeper body of Love, but that we forget. Spiritual practice of all kinds helps us remember. Prayer and creativity of all kinds help us to name the waves of our fear and then re-connect and re-center our hearts and minds in the more True currents of gratitude, wonder, Mystery, and compassion.

I'm trying a new spiritual practice a friend suggested this week. Whenever a worry shows up in my mind and body, I imagine it as a drop of rain that wants to join the Ocean of Love. "*I might not make the bills this month*" becomes a raindrop — a prayer for help that falls into the Divine One who holds all prayers like an ocean. "*I don't know what will happen if I take this risk*" melts into a drop of letting go, sliding into God's endless care and Mystery. "*The need is so big, how can I give?*" slips into a longing to love that meets all the Love there is. I feel a change when I practice this imagery as my prayer. When my worry drops touch Love's Ocean, they relax. I relax. Then after a while, those concerns tend to rise back up, transformed into simple steps or calm little actions that bring a bit of peace or offer a bit of joy.



What practices return you to Center, to Love, to a heart of gratitude? Maybe you simply remember to fill your minds with goodness over fear. As the Christian scriptures offer, "Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse." — Philippians 4:8, *The Message* version.

Whatever your spiritual path, I urge us all to remember and practice our best prayers and intentions in these times tempting us to fear. Drop by drop, we can transform the worry in us and around us into the calm and trust that keeps us afloat and makes room for the creativity and compassion we need.

* Thanks to friend Robert Smith for reminding me of the little walnut boat, and to Jean Lee, wondrous massage therapist who's helping me recover, for the image of worries as raindrops returning to the ocean of the One Love.

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A former GOOD NEWS *Associate*, Melanie Weidner is a Quaker Artist and Spiritual Director whose contagious love for image, metaphor, poetry, and spiritual exploration create joyful and transformative openings for growth. She engages wide audiences across the country with experiences of art and spiritual refection, then circles back to her Oregon studio to pray and create. See www.ListenForJoy.com or www.ElysiumArtists.com for a sampling.



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