

Out of the depths I cry to thee; Lord, hear my voice. (Psalm 130)
[Thoughts for a rainy day]

The wave that came upon me . . . buried me at once twenty or thirty feet deep; . . . I was ready to burst with holding my breath, when, to my immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out above the surface of the water. . . I felt ground under my feet and took to my heels . . . toward the shore. But the fury of the sea . . . came pouring after me again . . . with such force, that it left me senseless and had it returned, . . . I must have been strangled in the water.

Thus does Daniel Defoe describe Robinson Crusoe's eventual escape from the clutches of an ocean that consumed all his shipmates. How often has that story been told, with some surviving the ordeal and many never retrieved? The same scene is played out in Melville's *Moby Dick* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Milton's famous lament over *Lycidas*, a college friend who drowned in the Irish Sea. The tradition goes all the way back to the biblical Jonah, who, having been tossed overboard in a storm, remembers how *the flood enveloped me; breakers and billows passed over me. The water swirled around me . . . seaweed clung round my head. Down I went to the roots of the mountains.*

I suppose such stories fascinate us because they often aptly portray (metaphorically) our own situation. How often do we describe ourselves as deluged not just with rain but with bills or work; washed up; caught in the undertow of a friend's addiction? Sometimes, day after day, it seems like we're constantly having to come up for air lest we be dragged down not just by the ordinary demands of life but by all those more ominous denizens that dwell beneath the shadow of our smile: things like resentment, envy, sloth, vindictiveness, greed, doubt, despair.

Perhaps it's because we all at times experience that "sinking feeling" that the Bible often chooses to describe our ultimate redemption in terms of a rescue from deep water. Think about it. God doesn't leave Jonah submerged but deposits him upon dry land to commence his life anew. Nor does God allow the infant Moses to perish in the waters of the Nile but rescues him to lead his whole nation out of the Red Sea. Nor does God allow Noah to drown in a sea of troubles nor Joshua and his people to be swept away by the current of the Jordan River but insists that the river part to allow Israel to walk dryshod into the Promised Land. Nor, at the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, does God allow the primeval deep to prevail but, having breathed over it, cries out: "Let the dry land appear"; thereby giving humanity a foothold where it might evolve. And of course there is baptism whereby we rise out of water, symbolic of ignorance, depression, death itself, to live lives of faith, hope and love.

Such was the Christian faith John Milton expressed when he consoled himself over the drowning of his young friend Lycidas in those forever memorable words: *Weep no more . . . / For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead, / Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor; / So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed, / And yet anon repairs his drooping head, / And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore / Flames in the forehead of the morning sky: / So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walked the waves.*

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