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Fear or Steer?

This story may be closer to legend than fact, but when we heard it last week, it gave us pause. Here's the story: It seems that one evening, the royal yacht of the queen of England set sail with the queen and many of her guests aboard. The ship was the pride of the fleet, and its captain was a highly capable and experienced man. In fact, the captain of the queen's yacht had held his position proudly and without incident for thirty-six years. But on this night, something highly unusual happened. Suddenly, the captain saw lights approaching, dead ahead. He tried raising the approaching vessel by radio. But there was no answer. So he went to his signal light and began flashing in Morse code saying, "This is Her Majesty's royal yacht. Give way immediately."

A message quickly flashed back, "Cannot give way."

The captain was stunned by the effrontery of this message. He angrily flashed a reply, "You are addressing the captain of the Queen's yacht. I have been the master of this ship for thirty-six years, and I am ordering you to move out of the way!"

There was a long pause. Then the message came blinking back, "This is bosun's mate Jones here, and I have been the keeper of this lighthouse for two years..."

Well, true or not, it's an amusing story about mistaken signs and inappropriate responses. And it may offer us some insight into our own circumstances. In this period of economic uncertainty, haven't some of us felt a little like the captain of the Queen's yacht? We may feel we've successfully steered our ships through many waters in the past and had anticipated smooth sailing from here on out. But now, we find ourselves surprised by looming and unexpected obstacles. It appears, in fact, that real danger may lie dead ahead.

What do you do when confronted by unanticipated difficulty, or hardship, or grief? Some of us have the tendency to respond like the captain of the Queen's yacht – trying to forge ahead brashly without altering course, and maybe even blaming others for the problems. But as our little fable shows, such a response to threatening circumstances is neither sensible, effective, nor wise. What is a better response?

It's been said that the most frequently given command in the scriptures is "Fear not!" Perhaps that describes the best attitude to take in addressing any problem. If the first step we take in any crisis is to adopt an attitude of calm composure and confidence, we are less likely to compound difficulties by unfairly blaming others. We are also more likely, when calm and unafraid, to accurately assess our circumstances and steer around dangerous obstacles in our paths.

And how is it possible to eliminate debilitating fear from our lives and remain calmly effective in any situation? Well, that takes a lifetime of thoughtful reflection and prayerful self-assessment for most of us. But as people of faith, it is possible when we learn to trust in capacities beyond our own, and to adopt a perspective that sees beyond the present dilemma.

Is there a lighthouse in your path? Maybe it will turn out to be less an obstacle than a source of illumination for the way ahead!