

Mark 4 35-41 Jesus Stills a Storm

Our passage begins at the end of day during which Jesus has been giving his disciples insight into the nature of the coming Kingdom by sharing many parables about sowing and mustard seeds.

On that day, as evening is falling, Jesus has finished his teaching and offers this invitation to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side”, that is the other side of the “Sea” of Galilee a large, shallow body of water in the north of Israel below the Golan Heights.

Note Jesus does not explain why he wants to travel across the Sea of Galilee in failing light, rather than waiting until morning, which would be the option more like pass a risk assessment. He just invites and waits on the response.

This is an invitation to the disciples to cross out of a comfort zone in Israel listening to set foot on foreign soil dominated by gentiles on the other side of the lake. Potentially dangerous; certainly discomfort.

But the disciples obey and accept his invitation taking Jesus just as he was.

And other boats follow. But more on that later

For those setting out this is not going to be your normal uneventful boat ride. Rather the unexpected happens with forceful impact: a great windstorm moves waves to beat the boat so that it is being swamped.

Notice the reaction of the disciples. *Mayday! Mayday! We are all going to die.* Are they merely catastrophising in believing they are in mortal peril? Remember some fished for a living and so in the view of professional sailors, the imminent danger is very real.

Meanwhile in the back of the boat Jesus is taking a peaceful and unperturbed power nap.

The panicked disciples decide to call on Jesus and **wake him up**. They shout “Teacher (not Master, or Messiah, or “Lord,” as commentators’ point is so in Matthew 8:25) do you not care that we are perishing?” The implication is that, for them, Jesus is indifferent or uncaring to their plight.

Jesus wakes quickly and acts simply: he rebukes the wind and tells the sea be still. And the storm stops, and the seas is dead calm.

In the silence after the storm, Jesus now challenges them: “Why are you afraid?” “Have you still no faith?”. We can read the words but we do not have the facial expression or tone of voice to help us take in the true meaning of the question. For me, “Why are you afraid?”, I hear these words said quietly and calmly in loving disappointment rather than raised voice irritation.

“Have you still no faith?” I hear these words as “Have you *yet* not sufficient faith?”

Remember this story is set early in Jesus’ ministry, Disciples in this story do not fully understand who Jesus truly is: they call him teacher. Only in the fullness of time and the process of experience they will call him the Messiah. They are still in the early stages in their walk towards faith in the redeeming power of Jesus.

In the silence after the storm, the disciples too have time to start making sense of this stilling of the storm. Their response is one of **awe** at this demonstration of power over the elemental forces of nature. Awe a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder.

And our gospel reading ends with the disciples posing the great question: Who then is this (Jesus)

Implications

So how does a Gospel reading speak to us today?

When looking ahead at our Tuesday MT Meeting by reading this passage we were all invited to identify one word which really struck us. What one word does our Mark reading of Jesus Stilling the Storm passage stick in your mind. For me, at first it was control. A wise friend has persuaded me it is **trust**: firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something, for us Christian, Jesus.

So what does our Gospel reading have to say about trust. In a way our Gospel reading frames the challenge the problem the question about trust in times of emergency

Mark's Gospel was written in stormy times around time of devastation for the Jewish nation with the destruction by the occupying Roman forces of the Temple around 70 CE

We are facing the impact and consequences of a once-in-a-century world-wide COVID pandemic killing millions and affecting our way of life.

So I want look at some challenges and words of encouragement can we draw from our Gospel passage through three different lenses of **three groups** using today's metaphor of a boat travelling to a destination through storms.

1. **Each one of us: how are we doing on our individual journey?**
2. **Us a collective of believers also known as the Church.**
3. **What about the other boats on this journey?**

And I am going to stretch the metaphor.

Individuals: how are we doing on our individual journey?

- **Faith is a journey** where we **learn overtime** through teaching and experience to become, hopefully, more Christ like and better followers and ambassadors of Christ. We will make mistake along the way. Good news: **God does not abandon us when we do drop the ball.** When Jesus gets to the other side of Lake Galilee in Mark 5:1 he does not sack his slow-learning, lacking-in-full-faith disciples on the shore.
- **We do not get to choose what happens to us.** Being a Christian does not give us a get out of jail card free card for all of life challenges. We can expect our lives to be battered by unexpected natural and person made events. **BUT we do get to choose how we respond.** And the really good news is that as Christians we do not rely on our own resources but with the power of God through the gift and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to see us through. Jesus is with us – no matter what. And as God made flesh, he knows what it is like to be, well, human.
- And I know how glib this message of *don't worry about a thing* can sound to for those whose lives are being blown upside down by loss of livelihoods and loved ones through our COVID Crisis. But no matter how swamped our boat. Jesus is with us and during the long and perilous journey through fading light we have the cosmic

authority of the crucified and risen Christ is with us. God is with us, and we are not alone. And we have the promise that we will not be tested beyond our endurance.

- Our 2 Corinthians offers advice on **how to navigate life's difficulties**. Corinthians challenges us **not to accept the grace of God in vain. But to trust. To show great endurance** in the face of eg afflictions, hardships, calamities through **rightful behaviour** eg patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, and genuine love.

Our Church

The boat, it should be noted, is an ancient symbol for the church. How are we fellow passengers responding to the COVID storm and its aftermath? Here are some thoughts:

- Our church boat is battered but unbowed. There is some work to be done getting ship shape and we must all contribute as we feel called and financially able ,to help right the ship and so enable its onward journey though donations.
- How can we contribute. Of course there is money. We have wonderfully met our parish budget last year which means we are self-financing and not relying on the generosity of others to pay for the maintenance of our sails or our professional crew. Our professional crew aka Ministers. Do you agree that we are far more likely to journey on as a collective following God's will if we have an admiral the quality of Toby and a quartermaster financial wizard like Jeremy? I was going to give each of the Ministry Team roles but the chance for offence was too high. And my inner voice said my role is foghorn. And we have to trust that our congregations will be continuing to be inspired to give sacrificially as we have done so in the past - but the current year deficit remains stubbornly large
- And just as important as financial giving for boat maintenance is crew **volunteering**. Who will be there to help clean our churches and welcome visitors as we open up? We must trust that the Spirit will guide us towards being more than passengers

Others

- I used to teach Development Economics and I was stunned when someone learning about billions starving that one student said I do not care. I am not one of them.
Ouch!
- We are not the only ones floating together on the stormy sea. **What about others.** Though we are in the same storm, we are not necessarily in the same boat.
- One of the key strengths of our benefice is that we are outward looking. We do not stay in saved and safe in our comfort zone boat. We yearn for others to find the peace joy and full life that comes with knowing the Lord Jesus. We want to help others.
- There is a vacuum of need on the new 1,000+ housing estate being built in Curbridge. And the good news is that the Lord is providing the means by which build up community through a volunteer Pioneer Minister who is joining the Benefice in July. Details to follow.
- There is a vacuum of need with our young people who are facing a tsunami of welfare issues. And the good news is that the Lord is providing the means by which to reach out to our local youth through the financing and recruitment of a Youth Worker and Schools councillor who is joining the Benefice in September. Details to follow.

To conclude, leaving the crowd behind and jumping into a boat to follow Jesus does not guarantee us, as individuals or as a church, a storm-free life. Those in the other boat must face up to the same challenges in their own strength. We face life's challenges and step outside our comfort zones, we have the good news of God's Messiah, Jesus and the gift of the holy Spirit to help see us through for in Jesus Christ we trust.