

2019-02-24 ... 10am Service ... Archdeacon Paul Thomas
Luke 8: 22 - 25
'Jesus and the Calming of the Storm'

In order to understand this story we need some background information.

First of all, we need to know that the Jews feared the sea. To them it was the realm of evil and chaos. It was the sphere in which we encounter Leviathan and other sea monsters. It was a force present at the very origin of the created order and the Spirit of God brooded over it and sought to shape it. Only God was more powerful than the sea – and some of the Psalms refer to God stilling the raging of the waves or planting his footsteps upon them. This belief reaches its climax in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 21, when we read of heaven that 'there will be no more sea.' In other words, all that is devilish and divisive and destructive – all that is opposed to God's will – will have no place in eternal life as we are drawn into uninterrupted communion with God.

Secondly, as background information, we need to know that the Sea of Galilee where this incident described in Luke 8 v 22-25 took place was 680 feet below sea level. It existed in a 'basin' of hills and was surrounded by deep gorges and ravines. Every now and again the wind would come howling down those ravines and hit the surface of the sea with great force. One minute the scene was calm and idyllic – the next it would be in tumult and very dangerous. And that is what happened to Jesus and the disciples. They were caught up in a sudden squall and as they were tossed about helplessly and gave way to panic.

As we read the story with that background, the first question it raises is this: **Who is Jesus?**

We read that Jesus went to sit in the stern of the boat where there was a seat, usually cushioned, for a special guest. Jesus was tired from his work and so trusting his disciples to steer the boat he fell asleep. Here we encounter the humanity of Jesus – a man of flesh and blood capable of feeling the same weariness as you and me; capable too of entrusting himself to the skill and ability of his fellow human beings. A man who knew his limits, as we must all do as we grow in maturity.

But as the storm rages and the disciples panic they plead with Jesus to wake up and do something. Jesus stands and rebukes the storm – and the wind ceases and the waves calm. He has power over them. And so suddenly we are made aware that here is someone, albeit human like us, who exercises the power and authority of God. It is God alone who has power over the sea – so if Jesus has that power we are bound to see that he shares in God's power and authority. We are encountering the divine nature of Jesus, seeing him not only as Son of Man and human but as Son of God, and divine.

When we look at the story again we focus our attention on the disciples in the boat with Jesus. And we see there a picture of the Church – a company of people centred around the presence and person of Jesus, journeying together, and facing whatever may 'buffet' them along the way. It makes us think not just of the church in history facing so many persecutions, so many attempts to oppose it and even destroy it, but also if the church in our own time. What is it that makes our journey unsettled and gives us a feeling of being somewhat helpless? We are all aware of dwindling numbers and dwindling resources. We are growing ever weaker and seem to face an iron wall of indifference to our Christian faith.

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In such circumstances, it is not difficult to see how people might begin to lose confidence and hope. We are losing ground so quickly that it has to be doubtful that we will survive as a church.

Well if that is how you feel, this parable has one clear message: turn to Jesus. Turn to him in prayer. Seek his intervention – evidence that he is in control and can remove our sense of dread and despair. If we are to have a future it will be because of Jesus, and not just because of us.

Our last look at the story allows us to think about our own individual lives. Perhaps we are facing the disruption and difficulty that the disciples did. Perhaps there are storms raging in our lives that have overwhelmed us with fear and made us feel panic and even despair. If so, we need to remember that Jesus is present – and that He is in control.

I recall a woman telling me that she longed to visit her daughter and son-in-law and two grandchildren in Germany. But she was afraid of flying. We prayed about that and she felt her fear melt away as she recognised that Jesus would be with her. A few months later, she got on the plane and flew to Germany – and did so many times again.

Or a man told me that he had once faced a major operation in hospital and that he was filled with dread. He was a member of the church choir and after the Sunday service, the day before the operation, he confided in his Vicar. The Vicar took him into the empty church and got him to kneel at the altar rail. The Vicar laid his hands gently on his head and prayed that he might be filled with God's peace. He told me that at once his dread just drained away and the peace he felt remained with him right throughout the next day as he faced the operation.

It was Martin Luther King who often faced great danger for his stand against racism, even the bombing of his house, who wrote:

**'Fear knocked at the door
Faith answered
There was no one there.'**

This short story in Luke 8:22 – 25 has a great deal to teach us. It reminds us who Jesus is; it encourages us to continue our work as the church; it reassures us that fear need never get the upper hand in our lives because Jesus Christ is there to calm the storm and give us His peace.

Amen.

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