

Mark 4: 35 – end

'The storm will not last for ever'

This week sees my priesting ... or to give it its full term I will be ordained presbyter (also known as Priest). This time last year I was preparing to be ordained Deacon. But as you know it was delayed and moved due to the COVID -19 pandemic.

This year the service is very restricted on numbers as the situation continues. But what a year it has been, not just for me, but for all of us ... And I think something of the hardships of Paul speaks of our hardships this year. We've needed endurance with technology, we've had hard work adapting, sleepless nights of worry, some have had hunger – our foodbank has seen more referrals than before. We've needed understanding, patience and kindness.

As a church we have adapted, we have contacted and engaged with one another in new ways and we have struggled and strived, we live on – **'beaten, not killed, sorrowful, but still rejoicing!'**

It's not been an easy year has it? But, God has been with us ... Have you remembered that?

In the storm, in the upturned world of COVID where we've been fearful, locked up and locked down, sometimes we wonder if Jesus has just gone to sleep. Is God just taking a quick break? Does he do that?

Ever heard of the dark ages? – kidding – that's a line from 'Bruce Almighty' ... But on a serious note – what is going on? Well, I don't know. Sorry – if you were hoping for an answer at this point!

Let's turn to the Gospel passage for today and see if it helps us with our thinking. **(Mark 4: 35 – end)**

Ok so: The Sea of Galilee is about 700 feet below sea level, thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. At its southern end is a deep, cliff-lined valley. The wind funnelling through the surrounding hills and through this valley can whip the lake into sudden violent storms.

Imagine being on a boat in such a storm – That's the scenario the disciples are having in this passage. We read of a **'furious squall'** and that the boat was nearly swamped, but as fishermen, experienced boatmen surely they'd handled this sort of thing before ... right?

Well, I'd have thought so, but somehow, in the midst of this the disciples were terrified. This suggests a storm like no other storm before, a storm so apocalyptic in size that the disciples hadn't any memory of such a storm ... a storm so violent it was as if the water itself was raging.

But Jesus is in the boat, asleep.

The disciples, terrified of the storm, go to wake him up. Jesus wakes up and rebukes the wind, telling it to calm down, and the winds stopped and **"it was completely calm"**

First of all take a moment and imagine what that would have been like ... To go from being buffeted by the storm, and being terrified of drowning one moment to instant calm, just from Jesus telling it to calm. That must have been a pretty incredible experience, that dramatic change.

Plus to reflect on the words – Jesus has just cast out the storm – the words he uses here are the same kind he uses to rebuke demons – this storm was clearly not a normal storm, it had a deeper and more sinister dimension.

But even that is calmed at the rebuke of Jesus ... Struggling for your life, to quiet calm.

Jesus turns to them, after this dramatic situation, and says to them: **'why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?'**

We read that the disciples were terrified, asking each other: **'Who is this? even the wind and waves obey him!'**

The disciples would have feared the winds and the waves, despite some of them being pretty tough fishermen – a furious squall with the boat nearly swamped – the boat was sinking! A storm of flood and biblical proportions ... **PTO**

This would still be very scary, so they did what they thought was right, and went to wake Jesus.

I'm not going to debate with you here as to whether: ***"teacher don't you care if we drown?"*** was really the right way to talk to Jesus in this situation – it shows more that the disciples were overreacting, and were panicking, rather than trying to face the storm ... it shows that they had concluded that Jesus had stopped loving them ...

The disciples had placed ultimate hope in Christ. They had seen him release sufferers from the power of demons. They had heard him tell them truths that no one else had ever spoken before. They had heard him pray as only he could pray, with the Spirit-given intimacy with God in his prayers that they had no experience of. They had seen him challenge 'fleshly religion' and declare the love of God. They believed that he was a source of hope, that he could be trusted, that life would make sense with him at the centre.

But now he was asleep in their hour of need, and they were beginning to say to themselves not: **"I fear I am going to die" but: "I fear he is not who he claims to be."**

Jesus' response, of calming the wind, reveals Jesus ... one who had no fear of the storm, one who wanted to get rid of the noise so that he could have a conversation with them.

He turns to them: ***'why are you so afraid – do you still have no faith?'***

How would these men have acted, do you think if they had faith? Suppose their faith had been strong – their faith in Him and in God's care and love – what would they have done?

One thing is certain: they would not have wakened Him; they would have let Him rest. He was tired and needed the rest badly. They would have done so because their faith would have reminded them of two great facts:

First, the boat will not sink; it cannot sink when the Master of ocean and earth and sky is in it.

Second, the storm will not last forever.

The disciples were terrified – I mean surely you would be, you've just woken up this man, quite flippantly perhaps, and then he's calmed the storm, and asked why you have no faith!

They asked: ***'Who is this?'***

Well, I don't think they ever had a full understanding of who this Jesus is ... and I don't think any of us ever will, but that is faith, that is trust ... Trust in God's will for our lives, trust that we are forgiven, we are saved, we have a hope and a future.

And through all this we are called to be more impressed with Christ than we are with the problems we face, to have a fear of God in the proper sense.

It would be easy to take the route here to ask: **What storms are we going through?** Perhaps a long-term illness, bereavement, depression, financial problems, or perhaps something smaller, an argument, a friend or family member who won't accept the truth of Christ!

The boat will not sink ... the storm will not last forever.

Or maybe I'll take the route of the storm of Covid, the storm affecting all of us –

The boat will not sink ... the storm will not last forever, and that is still true.

But I think the very cosmic nature of this storm pulls us to a deeper question. Jesus' response to the storm is not a **'calm down friends, face your fears'** but an exorcism for a world 'out of wack' ...

The world is in chaos, the world is in storms, left right and centre people are turning from God and turning to themselves, putting themselves in the position of God and saying that they themselves can be the answer ...

The media is littered with 'self-help' or 'be a better you' kind of things and whilst they may begin to address the behaviours that are problematic they never get to the root of the problem.

Its like the plastic in our oceans – we know there is a plastic problem right?

(next page)

So people, dedicated volunteers go and clean up the massive floating islands of plastic ... And yet the root of the problem is not being resolved, more and more plastic is being made every day, more and more is being used and more and more is not being recycled – do you see what I'm getting at?

The root of the problem, the storm of the world, the deepest and darkest cataclysm is found in our own hearts, and the root of the problem – sin.

Sin pervades every part of our lives, and the world around us, crashing in mighty waves of wars, selfishness, greed and idolatry and Jesus is revealed here in this passage and throughout scripture as the revelation of God's extraordinary cosmic purposes to calm, redeem and restore it.

This is not just a therapy, asking us to 'grin and bear it' and remain strong – whilst important, it is also a point of remembering ... much more is at stake in this world, the wounds of this world are deeper than just our own problems, the storm threatens to upend us all and send us into the furious squall of a life without God through the darkness of Sin.

God, Jesus – he is the only one who can calm the storm, the only one who can bring us back to tranquillity ... The only one who can save ... The only one who can restore, redeem and rebuke ... The only answer to the storm of Sin.

Have we lost our way, have we lost our hope in Jesus, and his power in his ability to save us? Do we turn to other things faster than we turn to God in times of crisis? Do we think that Jesus has left us and we need to find our own solutions?

Sin is a storm that threatens to engulf us, but the boat will not sink, the storm will not last forever.

Jesus, through his incarnation, death and resurrection offers a removal of sin, a reason to no longer fear the storms.

Even if it seems like they will submerge us, in the boat with Jesus we will be carried safely through the storms of life and into a calm and glorious future.

'Dying, and yet we live on, sorrowful yet rejoicing, beaten, not killed' ...

Can you imagine what it would be like upon arriving in heaven, and meeting Paul and saying that when the storms of life came we simply gave up? Turned aside? Assumed the worst? Forgot Jesus is with us in the boat?

It comes down to perseverance, to trust, to a full reliance on Jesus, and Jesus alone to be with us and to help us.

In the ordination service this Thursday there is a line, a line that sticks with me in whatever I do, and it says this:

You cannot bear the weight of this calling on your own ... pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And this is what we are to do ... to pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit, even in the storms, to hold on to the assurance that God will carry us safely through.

It's not easy – storms come because this world is not yet fully restored, but Jesus has redeemed it, will redeem it and will renew it ... all will once again be calm.

We may not truly know why, or what is going on right now – we may not know what the plan or the purpose is, or it may feel like God's having a quick snooze – he's not by the way!

But we can know that despite everything, with Jesus with us, the boat will not sink, the storm will not last forever.

Amen.