

Isaiah 43: 1 – 4a; Mark 4: 35-41  
'Pandemic bereavement'

Prayer

Introduction ...

From March 2020 onwards, some words and phrases that we'd rarely used before became commonplace. I wonder what comes into your mind? Perhaps:

- Pandemic
- The R number
- Hospitalisation rates
- Social Distancing

But the one I want to bring to the fore tonight is “**unprecedented**”.

We heard it used about the laws that came into force to ensure Social Distancing and about the furlough scheme ... but I'm not sure we heard it about what I'm going to focus on for the next few minutes:

**Unprecedented bereavement ...**

Those of us whose loved ones died when strict Covid restrictions were still in place – we entered bereavement in an unprecedented way – no access or restricted access to those who were dying for some of us ... limited numbers at funerals and no funeral wake, family and friends not able to travel and gather ... and much the same in the weeks and months that followed. Those who lost loved ones when the restrictions had eased had a different experience but an experience still very much affected by the Covid restrictions that affected the life of the one who died for their last months.

**Unprecedented in our Gospel passage ...**

**Unprecedented**

This is where we can link to our passage from Mark's Gospel. That storm which blew up so suddenly was unprecedented in the life of the first fishermen disciples of Jesus – experienced sailors as they were.

They couldn't control what was happening – and the pandemic has certainly show us that we're less in control of our lives and our world than we thought we were.

So what did they do?

They turned to Jesus for help. They could have simply blamed him – and I think that they did to some degree - it was his fault that they were in the boat after all – but they woke him – with a question that showed they expected him to do something about it.

When we are in difficulty – whether bereavement or something else – we have a choice – we can turn away from Jesus because we expected him to protect us from difficulty ... or we can **PTO**

turn to Jesus for help – even whilst wondering if we should be blaming him – and will find that help is given.

Neither this Gospel passage – not the earlier one from Isaiah – deny that great difficulties may come our way – but both do give the hope of God's presence with us to lead us through the difficulty ... and this hope is based on the life experience of those who wrote the passages and of millions of believers since.

Twenty or more years ago – in a church not far from here, one of the Churchwardens had this experience – his youngest son – a teenager – died of an asthma attack – and he – though he had tears streaming down his face – said with great sincerity: **“Do you know, I think my faith in God is even stronger now than it was before”**.

Turning to God, rather than away, as he did ... can bring an experience of help in the midst of the most terrible of life's storms.

As we mourn the loss of those we've come to remember this evening, Christ comes to us, to bring us comfort and peace in the midst of unprecedented storms of life.

Amen.