

The Wymersley Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon 20th June 2021, Third Sunday after Trinity

Reading: Mark 4 35-end Trinity 3

I don't know if any of you have been on board a ship in a storm. Having endured it, I can say with certainty that it's not a very pleasant experience, but there was a fascination in watching those at work seemingly put their fears to one side as they battled against the elements as the ship rock and rolled its way across a stormy sea.

The weather conditions on Lake Galilee, only Mark calls it a sea, are dictated by its location. It is a body of water only about 13 miles wide and 7 miles across and 150 feet deep. What makes it unusual and sometimes dangerous is that it lies about 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by mountains. Warm air over the lake and cold air coming down from the mountains, sometimes mix and cause great storms. They may bear no comparison to travelling in hurricane conditions on a wide-open sea, but nonetheless, these sudden storms as described in today's Gospel would be scary. The disciples were fishermen, experienced sailors who were used to being out on the water in all weathers, but even experienced sailors can be fearful, no one can control the elements – except God!

What makes the disciples feel worse is that Jesus is not affected by the waves and the storm, he sleeps, resting comfortably on a cushion he finds on the seat reserved for the rower. The annoyed disciples wonder how he can sleep while they are all frightened and battling to keep afloat? This quite ironic as it's not too long ago when it was Jesus complaining the disciples couldn't keep awake with him, now the tables are turned!

The disciples think Jesus didn't care about them but the opposite is true, Jesus had faith in their ability as sailors and he trusted them to arrive at the shore safely, that's how he could sleep soundly; the disappointing thing for Jesus is that the disciples didn't have enough trust and faith in him to keep them safe.

When Jesus awoke, he spoke to the sea as a parent would speak to a noisy child: Quiet, Peace, Be still! The reality, Jesus was addressing the storm as a demon. In the Old Testament, creation is described as a struggle between God and the Sea. The sea is a monster – “that great Leviathan” and it is a recognition of God as the creator that the sea obeys and becomes calm and when it does, the disciples are once more amazed at Jesus and ask “Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?” No matter what amazing works they see Jesus do, they still struggle to accept in faith that he is who he says he is – the Son of God.

Now we don't need to be on a ship to be caught up in the storms of life. Fear can surface at any time in our lives, through illness for ourselves or someone we love, through death, divorce, loneliness, financial troubles, low self-esteem and diminishing mental health – the list is endless. What can we do to steady the boat in storms of life, where can we turn?

Jesus gives us the answer when he asks the question “Why are you afraid?” Have you no faith?

Faith has been the subject of the Gospels over the past weeks and we are all here because of our faith in God, but what does our faith actually do for us?

Well one thing is for sure, it doesn't save us from the storms and the sadness of life. Being a Christian doesn't make us immune from all that is bad in the world, and we can't just sit back and wait for our faith in God to solve all our problems. What we can do is call on God for the strength to endure the pain and the uncertainty of stormy times. I once heard someone say, “You don't find any

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atheists in a sinking ship” simply because, whoever we are, faith or no faith, it is when we are at our lowest ebb, that we call to God for help.

Is that true of you? Do you only speak to God when there is nowhere else to turn, Or do you put your trust in God at all times to guide you through?

We have all struggled to some degree over the past 15 months as Covid took over the world, and the nearer we get to the end, the further away the end seems. We are jaded and worn down; we want our freedom back. We are all 15 months older; youngsters have grown up and we have all aged. There may well be some people who will never go outside their homes again with any confidence, Covid 19 has been a storm that has changed us all, but it is just one of many that can disrupt our lives at any time. We read of Job praying to God in our first reading mention how “life is “full of trouble”.

So, what can we do in times of despair?

Well, we could be like the disciples in this instance and accuse Jesus of being detached, or uncaring or we could accept that it is our fear, not his care that is the issue to be resolved, through faith in Jesus we can survive AND flourish, despite our fears. If we trust in God at all times, it won't mean horrible things won't happen, but that we have God to lean on for comfort and the strength to cope. God our creator, who through Jesus, calms the wind and the waves and who acts with such divine power can do all things way above anything we as mere humans can imagine, he will be with us to the end of our days and beyond to bring us safely home.

Reverend Irene