

Luke 8:22-25 HT & Zoom 8.11.20

The burning question that Luke wants us to ask when we read his Gospel is “Who do you think Jesus is?”

In his first 7 chapters Jesus performed various miracles and taught in front of crowds, who were challenged to ask this question, “Who do you think Jesus is?” But in Chapter 8 something changes – it is no longer the crowds – but the close collection of Jesus followers - who are left asking who this Jesus that they are following is. At the beginning of chapter 9, these disciples will be sent out on their own for the first time to proclaim the Kingdom but before that Jesus needs to help build up their confidence in him.

They needed to know that whatever life threw at them – Jesus was still in control – In Chapter 8 there are four different overwhelming’s, one after another, situations that seemed impossible – but Jesus dealt with each one: Firstly there is the calming of the storm (in today’s reading), then the setting free of a demonised man, this is followed by the healing of a woman with an incurable bleed and finally the raising of Lazarus’ dead daughter.

These overwhelms that Jesus deals with are associated with every area of life: physical (storm) spiritual (demonised man) illness and finally death itself.

This passage could hardly have come at a better time for us. In so many ways our belief in humanity’s capacity to solve our own problems has been undermined. Even before Covid we were being constantly reminded that our world is under threat and we seem helpless to do anything about it. The stability that the end of the cold war was supposed to bring is undermined by the rise in global terrorism; The postmodern belief that we will continue to get richer and that life will get better and better sounds very hollow to Millennials; The miracle of antibiotics is now under threat as we are warned that resistance is rising and soon we may be living in a post anti-biotic world; The impact of global warming is becoming more and more visible and many scientists are now warning that we are fast approaching a tipping point from which we cannot recover. To all this we now add Covid-19 – a microscopic enemy that is destroying economies around the world as well as killing off such large numbers. Thinking back to March, I wonder how many, like me, had a deep down belief that scientists and doctors would come up with a vaccine or other solution, so that by now we would be on top of the problem and the country would be returning to normal. Instead I am preaching this at the beginning of the second lockdown and many of us are overwhelmed by what that means.

So, for all these reasons, we find our faith in science to solve all problems dented. If we feel overwhelmed by the storms that surround us, our passage

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invites us to join the disciples in the boat and look again to Jesus as our source of peace.

So we are going to spend a few minutes looking at this first overwhelming, as the storm threatened to swamp their boat and drown the occupants. Even the fishermen in the boat with Jesus had a fear of what evils the water contained. Jewish understanding of creation had the notion that God brought order out of chaos – chaos that was represented by the sea. We can hear this reflected in Psalm 74: “But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth.

13 It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.

14 It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.”

Water represented that chaos that still threatened God’s people. Surrounded by mountains, as it was, the Sea of Galilee was vulnerable to sudden storms as the wind funnelled down the valleys and created whirlwinds on the lake, against which, their small boat was defenceless. Jesus, having no fears of the water, had fallen asleep – but the disciples were terrified. In spite of the best efforts of the sailors among them, their boat was being overwhelmed by the waves - and the evil forces of the water were threatening to drag them down and kill them.

Although Jesus was physically with them, he seemed deaf to their cries as they yelled out “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” Jesus then rebukes the wind and the waters (which become calm) and rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith. The disciples then ask each other ““Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

Typically for Luke, he doesn’t give us the answer to the question because he is inviting us into the story – to ask the same question and reach the same conclusion that the disciples reached – that the only way Jesus could have control over the wind and the waves would be if he was God, himself – the creator of all things including the wind and waves. Just as the wind and waves recognise that he is their Lord, Luke invites us to reach the same conclusion that Peter is about to reach, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

So where does this passage leave us in our overwelmings?

Perhaps, like the disciples we experience being overwhelmed and it feels as if Jesus is absent. The scientists and experts we trusted in have been

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overwhelmed, but Jesus is still with us in the storm and he is not defeated by it.

The knowledge that Jesus is not overwhelmed is the beginning of finding confidence. It is God, not the virus, that is going to win. It is the job of the church to find the peace that Jesus brings. Some of us will be ill, some of us will die, some of us will lose jobs – but even in the bleakest moments Jesus will bring a peace that passes all human understanding – and it is this peace that the world needs. Never has it been more important for the church to find our peace in Jesus, so that we can be a means of sharing that peace with others.

Like the disciples we need to move from wondering where Jesus is in the overwhelming, to discovering that even the greatest problem cannot actually overwhelm him – and that he is our strength and our hope in the greatest storms.

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The Collect of the day

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things
in your beloved Son, the King of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**