

Trinity Baptist Church

Jesus Calms the Storm- Mark 4:35-41 (Louise Brady)

Jesus, we thank you that you are Lord over all things, in heaven and on earth. I pray for us today as we hear your Word, I pray you will open our hearts to your message this morning, and speak to us I pray. Amen.

This morning we continue our series on Mark, and the passage we will be looking at Mark 4: 35-41 'Jesus Calms the Storm':

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

I'm sure this passage will be very familiar passage to many of you. It is only seven verses, and yet so gripping and dramatic. Here in the UK we can be a little bit obsessed with the weather, it becomes the focus of our discussion topics. If we are stuck for something to talk about, usually we like to comment on the weather to see us through an otherwise awkward conversation.

One of my favourite social media accounts to follow is 'Very British Problems', it exaggerates aspects of British culture, and of course makes fun of it. The British weather commentary comes up quite often! One of the posts from last year when we had a storm was titled 'Things to do During a Storm'. See how many you identify with or have done:

1. Watch storm through window
2. Watch storm on telly
3. Listen to storm
4. Tell people to listen to storm
5. Read about storm
6. Talk about storm
7. Post online about storm
8. **Have a sleep** (which Jesus did).
9. Do a jigsaw
10. Cancel plans

We are fortunate that we do not experience destructive storms very often, if at all, here in the UK. However, when we watch the news, or a documentary, or even a film, we can see the impact that nature has, particularly how destructive storms can be. Storms are out of our control, there isn't anything we can do about them, and they can be scary. I would imagine it is particularly scary being on a boat in a storm too.

This morning I want us to unpack the story 'Jesus Calms the Storm' by:

- 1) Firstly, reflecting on Jesus' literal command over nature i.e. the **physical** storm.
- 2) Secondly, Jesus' own experience of **metaphorical** storms.
- 3) And thirdly, how Jesus can help us in our **metaphorical** storms.

Jesus in the Physical Storm

So firstly, Jesus in the physical storm, and his literal command over nature.

The disciples are in a boat with Jesus, there are also other boats around, Mark points this out to us in verse 36, meaning there are other witnesses to this account. Then trouble hits. Jesus is asleep; the disciples panic and decide to wake Jesus. It is important to remember that some of the disciples were fishermen, so they knew Lake Galilee better than most, and most certainly would have been the ones to know when to panic about being in a boat, in a storm. We therefore have to feel a bit sorry for them in this scenario. Nevertheless, Jesus wakes, and commands the storm to stop in three words "Quiet! Be still!", then rebukes the disciples, quite sharply! Jesus asks them why they are afraid, and asks them whether they have faith. The disciples, even though the storm has been silenced, are still terrified, not because of the aftershock, but probably terrified of the person on the boat who has just told the wind and waves to be quiet. They ask themselves "who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!".

What the disciples, and others, have just seen is a 'nature miracle'. The natural order of the world that we live in currently, in this scenario the storm, has been instructed to stop, and it does so **instantly**. Jesus has literal command over nature.

Now this isn't a miracle we see very often, and shouldn't see very often. C. S Lewis in 'The Problem of Pain' states:

"That God can and does, on occasion modify the behaviour of matter and produce what we call miracles is part of Christian faith; but the very conception of a common, and therefore stable, world demands that these occasions should be extremely rare".

C. S. Lewis

Pete Greig in his book 'God on Mute' goes through various areas of why our prayers may seemingly go unanswered. In Chapter 7 he writes about God's world and the complexity of creation, and says:

Around the world today, many people in different situations will pray earnestly for Jesus to quell dangerous storms just as He did that night on Galilee. A hurricane may be threatening to destroy their livelihood. Force-10 gales and mountainous seas may be about to drown them. Dark thunderclouds may be gathering ominously, threatening to spoil the long-awaited church barbecue event.

However, most of these prayers will not 'work' for a very important reason: The storms against which we may sometimes pray are vital to the wellbeing of millions of people... Can God control weather systems? Of course! God is sovereign and omnipotent... But if God were to calm every storm (or even most storms), the balance of creation would be thrown off kilter with devastating implications. And so, although it is sad, there may well be crops destroyed, ships that sink, and church barbecues spoiled by the rain. Reluctantly perhaps, God may say no to many prayers for the sake of the majority.

'God on Mute' by Pete Greig, pages 148-149

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't pray for a miracle to the natural order, we have a broken physical world that needs our prayers! However, just because we think our prayers sound reasonable to us, God knows better, and we have to trust Him on that, as by saying no to us God may be protecting many others.

Jesus calming the storm is a 'nature miracle'. Only God can change the natural order as creator, therefore Jesus is proving that he is God. This is the most important thing that Mark is reinforcing to us, it isn't just that Jesus is able to stop the storm (which is amazing), it's **how** he stops it. Jesus made it look easy! All Jesus had to do was command it, with those three words "Quiet! Be still!". The storm immediately stopped too, can you imagine!? No wonder the disciples were so terrified, they had seen a miracle, a literal nature miracle, seeing God in human flesh manifested before their very eyes.

Jesus' Experience of Metaphorical Storms

Secondly, we turn to thinking about Jesus' experience of the metaphorical storms.

Even though we may not fully experience 'natural storms' very often, I know we can all relate to 'metaphorical storms'. By this, I mean events, situations, and circumstances that are stressful, out of our control, uncomfortable, and unsettling. As a result of metaphorical storms we can suffer, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Jesus experienced these too. Jesus also went through storms when he was here on earth, not just the physical storm we read about, but metaphorical also.

As we approach Easter I have been reflecting on Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. This passage can be found later in Mark, chapter 14 vs 32-42:

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ "Abba,^[a] Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?" ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

How the roles are reversed, instead of Jesus being asleep in the storm with the disciples awake, this time the disciples are asleep in Jesus' metaphorical storm. Despite Jesus, in all his power and authority, asking them to keep guard, they fall asleep, three times! Not even just once. The disciples' faith had been growing since that

day when Jesus calmed the storm, and yet despite them seeing him do this, the penny hasn't quite dropped for them. The disciples by this point in the garden had seen Jesus heal people, and cast out demons. The disciples will have also heard Jesus' teachings about the kingdom, and his parables. You would think that Jesus asking them for help for a change would make them sit up and wonder what on earth was happening! Jesus needed his disciples, he needed their help, to keep watch.

Jesus in his humanity was in the garden praying to the Lord to 'take this cup' away. Jesus' cry of suffering emotionally, spiritually and physically. Jesus in a metaphorical storm.

How Jesus can help us in our metaphorical storms

When we are in our own metaphorical storm, generally we don't know why we are going through them. Metaphorical storms can make us feel incredibly alone, and helpless, and they can seemingly happen at any time, without warning. Although Jesus and the disciples were in a physical storm in this story in Mark (and we see 'the nature miracle'), we also see a turning point in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, and how far away they were from understanding who Jesus really was. There was a sharpening of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, on the issue of faith. It is why Jesus pulls them up on it. Jesus meets a human need by calming the storm, but rebukes the disciples for not having faith that his presence on the boat was enough. The disciples believed they needed Jesus to act, but Jesus wanted them to trust him. His very presence with them was all they should have needed.

We all face metaphorical storms in this life, and I am sure you are thinking of those situations and circumstances now, as well as how you felt and your experience of them. How do you respond when you are going through a storm? Do you believe Jesus can calm them? Or does it feel like he sleeps through them? It is so easy for us to be consumed by the storms that we face. During some storms we may cry out to Jesus, and keep crying out to him, but other storms we may sometimes try and face alone, because we think we are alone.

We probably won't understand why we go through these storms either. Nevertheless, we can trust that Jesus is with us through them, and that Jesus understands them. Sometimes Jesus has a purpose in the wait, a purpose that may be proving the strength of our faith to ourselves by continuing to trust in him, despite the storm.

In difficult times where I just don't know what to do I often turn to worship music as a way to encourage me or at least try and match how I am feeling. I remember a particular storm for me where my Nan had died quite unexpectedly, my Dad (who has M.S) was in hospital with sepsis and critical, and we had just had a foster child move on. Often storms aren't just one thing, there can be many things all at once and one of those things was bad enough for me, but to have it all together I couldn't process the sheer amount of grief, anger, sadness, that I was feeling. I didn't know what to say to God, I didn't know where to turn to in scripture, but I remember having one particular song that I listened to called 'Praise you in this Storm' by Casting Crowns, and I basically listened to it on repeat. The chorus says:

*And I'll praise You in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For You are who You are
No matter where I am
And every tear I've cried*

*You hold in Your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise You in this storm*

I like these lyrics because they make me choose to praise Jesus in the storms, because it is a decision we have to make. I know that Jesus can instantly command all storms to stop, but when he doesn't, choosing faith in him despite it. It can be difficult, it can be really tough, and the last thing we want to do.

We have to choose Jesus to trust in the storms. We have to choose to praise him even when we don't feel like it, or if we think he is being silent. We should choose Jesus because he doesn't leave our side.

This past year for many will have felt like a big storm. Fear of COVID, not being able to see loved ones, losing loved ones, uncertainty in jobs, not being able to meet all together as a church, are just a few examples. We all have faced different storms in different ways just in this past year alone. I don't know anyone who has said that this past year has been 'fine' or 'easy'. However, remember that Jesus also knows what it feels like to be in a storm, and as we approach Easter, especially think about the storm Jesus went through for us, remember Jesus' words "my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death". He gets it.

Let Jesus draw near to you, even if it doesn't feel like he is near. His presence is enough, do you believe it to be enough?

Response

Take the opportunity to reflect on the storms you have experienced, or are currently experiencing.

How did you react to those storms? Was calling out to Jesus the first thing you did? Or do?

How do storms make you feel? Do you feel abandoned? Rejected? Alone? Do you think Jesus understands how that feels also? Why? And what does that mean to you?

Take some time now to reflect.