

'Do you know him?'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

*Have no fear, for I have redeemed you; I call you by your name; you are mine. –
Is.43,1*

Collect:

O God our defender, when storms rage about us and cause us to be afraid, rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us all from unbelief; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

In heavenly love abiding

In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here;
the storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?
Wherever He may guide me,
no want shall turn me back;
my Shepherd is beside me,
and nothing can I lack;
his wisdom ever waketh,
his sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
and I will walk with him.

Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me,
where the dark clouds have been:
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free:

my Saviour has my treasure,
and He will walk with me.

Anna Laetitia Waring (1820-1910)

Mk.4,35-41

Dear friends

Jesus' command to the disciples, '*Let us go over to the other side*', given actually *when evening came* rather than at a time when the crossing might have been safer, is quite rightly understood when it reminds us that church and faith as fellowship with Christ is a matter of journeying, not of settling down and settling in. It is a reaching for what is to come; the mind is on God and the things of God, not the seen but the unseen. Being church and having faith is being on the way, is being on a pilgrimage. "*For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*" (Hebr.13,14) We recognise that the world in a very important way is not our home but the place of preparing us for our true home as we serve God and seek his kingdom. Jesus taught those who would follow him that they would share his experience with regard to this world of being homeless in it: "*Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" (Lk.9,58) The journeying will be through changing circumstances and happen under varying, often challenging conditions.

In many ways this is counter to, and may even collide with, what's in us: our longing for permanence and for places to lay our head, for settled situations, for being at home with what we have here; it runs counter to our desire through planning to control developments and outcomes, and not least also with our desire to be free to go where *we* want.

Yes, Jesus' words '*Let us go*' don't square up neatly and comfortably with such desires and longings, but they call church to be faithful, to follow him, trust and obey him as it faces changing circumstances and conditions which may often cause fear and threaten its purpose – to love and serve God.

Let us look at this passage as it shows us vital truths about the way of the church and the nature of faith in its calling to follow, trust and serve.

After obeying Jesus' request to '*go over to the other side*' the disciples soon find themselves in dire straits. A furious storm is threatening to bring everything to an unhappy conclusion. Neither life nor property is safe anymore and their very survival, it seems to them, is at stake.

It is not difficult, nor is it unrealistic or far-fetched, to find in this a description of the church's experience, and that of faith, as it journeys with the Lord. The boat is being rocked by heavy seas: There is the problem of internal strife and rifts, a falling into sin and the accusation of guilt, a crisis of leadership, financial turmoil and pressure, unreconcilable differences about the way forward, despondency and lacklustre commitment, fear brought on by an uncertain future, facing adverse circumstances, falling numbers and threat of closure, a crisis of faith or a silent drifting away – things and events such as these threaten the life of church and faith.

The disciples, under great pressure, have to react. The question is: what reaction is truly salutary? Or, when is their reaction truly salutary? The answer is: When they turn to Jesus. However, when they do so they find him asleep and have to wake him up! So you might ask, 'What is this all about?' Does it not say (Ps.121): "*He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep*"?

But here the Lord does exactly that – slumber and sleep while everyone is in a state of panic! However, the fact that he is asleep in this moment of crises, and has let it evolve, provides the opportunity for the disciples to ask this vital question: “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*” And it is a vital question because what they are asking in other words is this: “Have you no part in our distress and problem? Are you indifferent about the threat we are facing? Unsympathetic towards our weakness and frailty? Are you as lost as we are lost and cannot help?”

This question, you see, is like a light-beam directed on to exactly what they need to see and grasp: namely, that he *has part* in their distress, their problem, frailty and lostness, that he is in their place facing what is threatening them; but that he is who he is – lost with them but not lost like them, and who can therefore bring their lostness to an end! Which is what the disciples then experienced: “*He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*”

But that’s not all. Jesus in turn then asks the disciples something. And again it is a question that intends a vital insight: “*He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’*” In other words what he asks them is:

“Why do you let your fears of what is threatening you carry you away, to thinking that the place of hope and trust is in yourself, to turning your minds away from my word as though it should fail you, letting your minds instead be ruled by your worry and what causes you to panic and lose your way? Do you still not believe that what threatens you threatens me and its dealing is with me? Do you still not believe that what I do and what I say, my work and my word, is for you and is your strength to do what I ask you to and what is needed – to do the will of your Father in heaven whom winds and waves must obey, and do, and so not perish – not at all! – but live?”

The disciples are terrified, understandably, at both what they see and what they hear, and do not answer Jesus’ question. But they ask each other a question which points the way to how they will come to and will be in a place where they shall not be afraid and shall believe – such as to be free to follow, trust and obey. They asked each other, “*Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!*” The question is, then, and the key: Do they know him?!

Dear friends, do you know him? Do you know him who “*being in very nature God*” (Phil.2,6) let himself be threatened in the way you are, and bore your sin and death so that you might live? Do you know him who made his place with the lost so as to save them? Do you know him who has conquered sin and death and says: *Don’t be afraid; just believe* (Mk.5,36)? Do you know him who becomes the life of those who follow, trust and obey? To see and learn, by seeking and asking, who the Lord Jesus is and what you have in him, is being on the way. He lives and is no further away from anyone than is his word.

Of a life-plan that is self-driven and self-seeking, captive to fear and sin and oppressed by it, and careless of the will of God, there are myriads of various versions. The only true alternative is the life plan the vision of which is to know the Lord.

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Eph.3,14-19) AMEN

- time of prayer / intercession – [we give thanks for God’s mercy and faithfulness, for the compassion and steadfast love he has for all that he has made, that all his judgments are just and righteous, that he is our refuge and the helper of all who call to him; we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God’s Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here, for our church, the church’s leadership; we think of the situation in India, Nepal and other places, the suffering of the people there and elsewhere, the attempt of the authorities to regain control; we give thanks for the help that is being delivered; we pray for the situation in Israel, the rift between the Palestinians and the Jews; for perseverance in the determination to share our means with those who lack them; we pray for God’s blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Now to him who loved us, gave us every pledge that love could give, freely shed his blood to save us, gave his life that we might live, be the kingdom, power and glory and thanksgiving evermore.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN