

Trinity 3 Mark 4:35-end Calming the Storm Tim Collins

We undoubtedly live in a beautiful part of the world. Particularly with the estuary and coast literally outside our front doors. And yet, that beauty, that ever-changing river and sea, also holds within it many challenges and dangers.

Its power, its unpredictability is something, of course, we have witnessed here, in Dawlish. The washing away of the railway an all too recent memory. And the tragedy of lives lost while fishing or swimming or enjoying other water activities is an all too frequent occurrence off our coasts.

In just a couple of weeks' time we will celebrate Sea Sunday – a recognition of the perilous work undertaken by thousands of people around the world, as they earn their living from sea and river. And this morning's reading would fit so well with that commemoration. Because this is a very vivid report of life at sea; the finely drawn details suggesting an eyewitness account:

We are given the time of the day
We know that there are other boats in the area
We have a picture of an exhausted, human Jesus – Jesus the man
Even that there is the cushion in the boat on which Jesus sleeps!
And of course, the sudden violent storm

It began so simply, a journey of five miles across the lake – not too demanding, nothing out of the ordinary. They were there because of Jesus. "He said to his disciples, 'Let us go across to the other side'".

But then the storm; a growing wind which was as bad as anything these fishermen had ever seen. These sudden, violent storms are a feature of the Sea of Galilee. Winds blow in from the Mediterranean in the south-west and create these violent squalls. Create treacherous conditions on the lake.

Even though four of the men in the boat were fishermen - Peter, Andrew, James and John - and they had known the Sea of Galilee and its sudden squalls from their boyhood, but this particular storm was so horrendous that even these hardened fishermen thought all was lost.

The waves crashed into the boat, and the men couldn't bail out fast enough. Death seemed a heartbeat away. And Jesus is sleeping through it all. The frightened, distressed disciples roughly rouse him from his slumbers. He stands up in the tossing vessel, takes control and he quietens the storm. Jesus mildly reproves the disciples for their unbelief and fears. The whole incident is over. The Word of God once again bringing calm from chaos.

But there is little doubt that the sight of Jesus commanding the winds and the waves would have a powerful and profound effect on his disciples. And should have a powerful and profound effect on us, too. Because, in this simple, dramatic story, we come face to face with reality:

Storms will always come into the life of Christ's disciples; into our lives.

If Jesus hadn't been a significant part of their lives, the disciples would have been back in Capernaum that evening, smelling the supper being cooked, and looking forward to a night's sleep. But he had said, "Let's go." . . . and they went. Christ had become their teacher, they had faith in him. He had summoned them from mending their nets, from the tax office, and they'd obeyed. They'd given up everything for him,

But soon they discover that it is not all plain sailing. There were to be many storms as they follow Jesus, as they lead the church, in the years ahead. This evening they were staring in the face death; and they were more scared than at any time in their lives.

When we follow Jesus, we won't be immune from sickness or stress or unhappiness or uncertainty or any of the myriad of storms and rainy days that are what life is about! Illness, family break-up, miscarriage, dementia,

redundancy, abuse - they come into Christian homes as they come into every home.

As Christ's disciples we are not automatons or computers, programmed to take things in our stride. Our bodies feel strain; our bodies feel pain; our bodies feel weariness. We are just as vulnerable to fear, regret, sorrow, anxiety, as anyone else.

But even though we might face difficulties and pains; might face many storms in our lives, as followers of Christ, we can hold onto two things:

The first is that Christ has almighty power.

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." That is the Power of God!

The same power that created the world and life

The same power that created volcanoes and storms and floods

The same power that created the petal or the snowflake or the feather

The same power that opens the Red Sea to the Promised Land

And that same power works in our lives, too. With faith; with love.

And the second is that Jesus deeply cares for us.

We are told that Christ slept through this raging storm, and it was necessary for the men to rouse him: "The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'"

The disciples are caught up in the pressure to stay alive; to keep their heads above water. "Lord, don't you care?"

Of course he cares. Jesus had called them; Jesus loved them. And he would show that love to the utmost, when he opens his arms wide for them on the cross. But at this moment, in the midst of this storm they can't see, they don't understand. Their own fear overwhelms them. The noise of the wind and waves has silenced the voice of Jesus.

The apostles believed in Christ, loved Christ, and gave up all to follow Christ, but in this moment, in this storm the apostles were afraid. Were afraid to die.

But in that time of fear, in that time of challenge, we see how tender was Christ. He didn't say, "You disappoint me! Have I been with you so long and you think I don't care? Shame on you." Before a word to the disciples, he silences the wind, he silences the waves:

"Peace! Be still!"

And only then does then he ask, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Throughout his ministry Christ again and again shows compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love towards the disciples. He does not cast them off for their stupidity. He does not reject them for their unbelief. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He leads them step by step along the Way.

Jesus, too, shows us compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love; and he challenges our fears of what might happen, that we might not be able to cope. And the question he asked of the disciples, he asks of us, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" But he does not reject us for our unbelief. He does not cast us off for our stupidity. Because, has he not told us that he will lead us, that he will never leave us, that we will be with him at the end?

He teaches us of what we are able to bear. He leads us step by step along the Way; he guards us and guides us; he feeds us and loves us. As he said to the wind and the waves on the lake; as he says to the wind and the waves that assault us in our lives:

Be still and know that I am God. Amen