

Sunday, June 23rd 2024 Trinity 4

Job 38.1-11, Psalm 107.1-3,23-32, Mark 4.35-41

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the best things, which happened from my point of view, was the opening of the channel tunnel, as I am not a good sailor. At the beginning of my career at DCGS, we took some pupils on a trip to France and the crossing was from Newhaven to Dieppe, 31/2 hours. It seemed like three weeks to me!

But the sea can also be frightening. We once rented a house on the shore of Lake Windermere, which came with a rowing boat and one day we decided to row across to Bo'ness. It was scary, as every time a large pleasure boat went past, our boat bounced up and down in the resultant wash. The sea contains great mysteries for us. Maybe that is why some people still believe in the Loch Ness monster.

The story of the stilling of the storm is an attempt to demonstrate the power of Jesus over nature. The reaction of the disciples is presented quite unfavourably, as often in Mark's Gospel, and they are seen as rebuking Jesus for his lack of concern. Matthew and Luke change it to an appeal for help. The command, 'Peace, be still', rather than being addressed to the disciples, is intended to show Jesus as Lord of nature, but the disciples do not grasp the significance of Jesus' action. All they can say is, 'Who is this?'

Today's first reading contains God's response to Job's challenge, and this comes through the whirlwind. This is a traditional accompaniment to God's appearances in the OT, for example, in Psalm 18: 'He rode upon the cherubim and flew; he came flying on the wings of the wind.'

Job has complained about God's silence, and now God breaks the silence, but his voice is wrapped in the mystery of the centre of the storm. It becomes clear that God's voice is non-committal, as he does not pass judgement on Job as innocent or guilty, nor does he mention any form of salvation. Rather, he overwhelms Job with his infinite power, as it is shown in his control of all nature in his measuring of the earth at the beginning of creation and his command over the chaos of the ocean.

Psalm 107 begins with a thanksgiving: 'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious, for his steadfast love endures for ever,'

The priests call on those, who have experienced God's salvation to testify to his saving love:

'Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, those he redeemed from the hand of the enemy.'

The sovereignty of God is emphasised throughout, and the summons to thanksgiving is addressed to seafarers rescued from the storm. God is seen as raising the storm, which he eventually stills:

'For at his word the stormy wind arose and lifted up the waves of the sea. He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were calmed.'

Today's readings, then proclaim God's sovereignty and control over creation. But God delegates some of his control to us as part of his creation, and he gives us freedom to make choices and to decide how we live on this earth. We often seem to fail. But with that comes responsibility to look after the created world and our environment; we pollute it; we throw litter all over the place, even in beauty spots; we can be careless, setting fire to places, wasting food. Yet, the readings show that God is always present; that is what the story of the stilling of the storm indicates, and also that God will protect us. We simply have to have faith. Our part is to try to be faithful disciples and to do our best to look after this beautiful world, which God created for all of us to live in.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.