

I have always been fascinated by the sea, admiring its beauty and rhythmic movement but at the same time I have always been scared of it. No, that's not the right word. I have always been terrified of it.

It's the reason why for most of my adult life I avoided like the plague going on boats and I never, ever swim out of my depth, even in a swimming pool. How I was awarded my life saving medal when I was training to be a police officer is one of the great unsolved mysteries of this world.

In fact, my fear of the sea is probably even greater than going to the dentist which is really saying something. Yet, unlike the dentists, I am repeatedly drawn back to the sea. There is nothing more beautiful, peaceful and relaxing in the whole of creation than looking out over a turquoise blue sea scape.

And although the Sea of Galilee is really a large lake, it nevertheless provides that turquoise sea scape. It also has a well-chronicled record of hugely ferocious and sudden storms caused by strong winds sweeping down onto the water over the surrounding mountains.

Remember, amongst Jesus's disciples were seasoned fishermen, well used to the vagaries of the lake so when Luke says the boat was in danger of being swamped and they were in great personal danger, we must accept they thought they were on the brink of death.

These expert sailors have run out of options. Or rather, except one....Jesus....who is fast asleep. What a contrast that makes. On the one hand we have Jesus's disciples fearing for their lives and on the other Jesus peacefully sleeping.

Why could that be? The best answer I can think of is that he knew that it was not his time to die. How many times do we hear Jesus say to his disciples 'My time is not yet come'. Well, being fast asleep was one sure way of showing his disciples just that.

Of course, the sea is frequently used as a metaphor in the bible, representing disorder and chaos, where evil in the form of sea-serpents dwell. Which is why Chapter 21 in Revelation cheers me up no end because there Jesus reveals that in the New Jerusalem there WILL be no sea.

There will be no sea because all evil, chaos and disorder have been vanquished. Which is why death, mourning, crying and pain will be no more. God will have wiped away every tear from our eyes and peace and beauty will reign for ever.

That is the eternal hope woven into the very fabric of our faith. That Christ's resurrection exemplifies the ultimate triumph over death, despair disorder and chaos. Yet despite the fact that I truly believe this to be true, I wonder how I would have been feeling if I was on that boat.

I don't really know. I suppose I've faced up to two or three life threatening situations when I was in the police, but because I didn't have an active faith at the time I always put my survival down to the extra adrenaline pumping through my body and the experience of my colleagues.

But one thing is certain, any and all of us would have been filled with just as much dread as the disciples were because we have all experienced storms in our lives at some time or other.

The storms will have been different but equally awful. Being bullied at school, trapped in an abusive relationship, going through an acrimonious divorce, suffering a miscarriage or losing a loved one. The times when you can't sleep or feel physically sick through worry.

Two instances come to mind for me. The time when I returned to my house as a widower for the first time and put the key in the front door and didn't have the strength of courage to open it. Or on a much lighter note, the occasion when I was getting changed for my very first date with Jane and was shaking so much – rriipp - I put my foot straight through the seat of my trousers.

It is situations such as these where we feel out of control, and which cause us great distress, anxiety and fear that are the storms of life we all have to face. It is in those times that we need to remember to this story.

The disciples had allowed their circumstances to determine their level of faith. The danger of the storm spoke louder than Jesus's calm. Let us never forget that at the centre of the biggest and fiercest hurricane there is a calm and Jesus can and will be the calm in our storms of life if we reach out to him.

And we can reach out to him without fear, because as we heard, Jesus didn't rebuke them or leave them to it; he simply displayed his amazing awesome power and brought peace into their lives once more.

We are not told how the disciples responded to Jesus's action, merely that they subsequently arrive safely on shore. Two

thousand years on we know the full story, we can see this as an example of Jesus calling the disciples to a deeper-rooted faith that isn't so easily shaken like the boat they were in.

Their response to the storm was fear and the theologian R.C. Sproul suggests they were in greater fear now. Because Jesus had just proved that he was God. They were in the very presence of the Holy God.

But I'm not sure I agree with Mr Sproul because in John 4 we are told that God is love, and that there is no fear in love. Thankfully, for those who believe in Jesus, that fear has passed. That doesn't mean we will never be fearful again but we do have the hope of eternal life with him.

Revd. Terry Ward-Hall, 23 Feb 2025