

Jesus Calms the Storm (Luke 8:22-25, Genesis 2:4-end, Rev 4) 20th Feb SL

Don't listen to the critics! The prophetic insights of the Church of England are alive and well given that it has aligned its lectionary with meteorological patterns, so that we hear Jesus' calming of the storm in the immediate aftermath of Storm Dudley and Eunice!

Having had this very recent reminder of the power and violence of storms, we can better imagine the disciple's amazement at Jesus' authority: "who then is this, that even the winds and water obey him?!"

In fact, I think the story described in Luke's gospel, is perhaps one of the best summaries of the entire Gospel and good news of Jesus.

In this story, we see who Jesus is: fully man and fully God. Having been pursued by demanding crowds, going from town to town, Jesus is exhausted and retreats with his disciples to go to the other side of the lake. Lying in this small wooden fishing boat, with dust on his feet, and probably not smelling terribly fresh, Jesus is so tired that he falls asleep—such a deep sleep that even the storm doesn't wake him. Here we are given a very human image, Jesus exhausted and tired from his ministry.

His humanity perhaps even comes across as he rebukes the storm and his sharp question to the disciples: "where is your faith?"

Having had plenty of recent experiences of being woken mid-sleep, albeit by a teething baby rather than panicked disciples, I can imagine the way in which Jesus might have rebuked the storm... and the disciples!

Sadly though, I seem to lack the same authority when it comes to calming Jos.

Yet, in Jesus' humanity, we see the full presence of God. As he commands the winds and the waves into stillness and calm. The Genesis account reminds us, only God himself has this power over creation. As Revelation tells us, this is the Lord Almighty, who was, and is and is to come—through whom, and in whose image, all things were created and made. Luke is clearly telling us *through this story*, the very same God who created heaven and earth, is fully present in this human being, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, the Creator comes among us as a human being, to show God's utter solidarity with his creation. This tired, exhausted person, asleep in the boat, yet whom even the wind and the waves obey.

So, this story tells us who Jesus *is*. Fully God. Fully human. The God of the whole Universe, who is intimately with us in the midst of life.

In this story, we see both the comfort and challenge of the Gospel for us today. The comfortable truth, that no matter what we are going through, even in the most terrifying and bleakest moments of our lives, we can trust that God is with us and he is ultimately in control.

The life of a Christian does not mean we will never face storms in our life, but we can trust that even here, God is with us, closer than our very breath, by the prevailing wind of his Spirit. This is the comfort of the Gospel, that even when all seems to be crashing down around us, as Julien of Norwich put it, “all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.”

But in this story, we also hear the challenge of the Gospel, as Jesus questions his disciples: “where is your faith?” This same question confronts us today. Do we trust that God is with us now? Even in those moments when he seems absent; who seems asleep while we are drowning?

We might sympathise with the disciples here. These were experienced fisherman, who knew a bad storm when they saw one. And they do indeed turn to Jesus for help– “Master, master, we are perishing!”

But I think, this is part of the challenge we are faced with. Because although Jesus was with them in the boat the whole time, it was only when the waves were coming over the sides and they were frightened of drowning that they turned to him.

CS Lewis once famously wrote: “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

This certainly resonates with my own spiritual life. For it is often *only* in the most desperate times that I really turn to God, and reevaluate my trust in him.

Many of us found our prayer life deepening during the pandemic for instance. Or often in other times of crisis. These moments clearly show us the limits of our powers, and our need for help beyond ourselves. And the good news is that God meets us here in our suffering, in our need and in our fears!

But Jesus is calling his disciples to a deeper trust. The kind of faith that isn't just an "added extra" when we reach the limits of our capabilities. Rather, he calls us to a faith that stems from truly *knowing him* in our daily lives. Jesus wants us to know that he is with us, not just in the fringes and extreme moments, but in the everyday.¹ Not as a last-resort rescue plan, but as our daily bread.

This was something I learned from the Melanesian Brothers when I was stranded with them during the first lockdown. Despite being on this tiny island thousands of miles from home, with one hospital, no ventilators, and Lily pregnant at home, I had a surprising sense of peace. Not just because of the palm beaches and turquoise waters... but because of sharing in their daily life, where they were learning to trust God together. When they thanked God for their food, their health, their safety – *they really meant it*, because these things were not guaranteed. And so, when the pandemic began, they continued their life together with little fuss, trusting in God's care and provision, because it is what they do every single day.

Like an elite athlete or musician who trains committedly, so that when the extreme pressure situation comes, their performance comes as second nature to them. So, our trust in God in the extreme moments comes when we practice this trust in the everyday.

Thankfully, our life of faith is not that of an elite athlete or musician— all about pristine performance. Faith is a *gift* from God, and we learn faith not by standing as outside observers, not through understanding alone, but as those who swim in the water of God's grace. And we see this in the life of the disciples, that as they shared daily life with Jesus, through various failures, they increasingly learned to put their trust in him. Thus, these same disciples who feared for their lives in the storm, end up giving their lives *freely as martyrs* precisely because of their deep faith.

So too, as *we hear* Jesus pose the question, "where is your faith?" In the storms and in our everyday lives Lord, may our faith be found in you.
Amen.

¹ Writing from a Nazi prison cell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflecting on just this:

"The belief in resurrection is not the 'solution' to the problem of death. The 'beyond' of God is not the 'beyond' of our cognitive capacity. God is 'beyond' our lives... not where human capacity fails, at the limits, but rather in the middle of our lives."