

Second Sunday before Lent 2019 Luke 8:22-25

Sudden storms are a feature of the Sea of Galilee which is surrounded by mountains except in the south where the Jordan flows down to the Dead Sea. Winds blow in from the Mediterranean in the south-west and create violent squalls known to every fisherman on the lake, but this particular storm was so horrendous that even fishermen thought they were lost. Four of the men in the boat had plied their trade fishing. Peter, Andrew, James and John had probably known the Sea of Galilee and its unexpected squalls from their boyhood. The sight of Christ commanding the winds and the water obeying him would have particularly impressed these fishermen. The conclusion of this extraordinary voyage is the fear and amazement of these men who knew him best, and knew the Lake best;

'Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him'.

Life as one of Jesus' disciples must have been fast and furious. In the second part of Luke 8 we see Jesus showing the disciples his power. In today's gospel reading, as he calms the raging sea, we see his control over the natural order. Prior to this there had been the ultimate put down of his mother and brothers, which came after he had explained to them the parable of the sower;

¹⁹ Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." ²¹ But he said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Then followed the exorcism of the man full of demons from Gerasena which demonstrated his power over the spiritual order;

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus^[k] sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

This is followed by the healing of the woman suffering from a very serious haemorrhage which demonstrates his power over the physical order,

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." ⁴⁷ When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. ⁴⁸ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

The climax of all of this was his power over death when he raises Jairus' daughter from the dead.

*They were all weeping and wailing for her; but he said, “Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.”*⁵³ *And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.*⁵⁴ *But he took her by the hand and called out, “Child, get up!”*⁵⁵ *Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat.*⁵⁶ *Her parents were astounded; but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.*

As Helen Orchard, an Anglican commentator writing on this gospel reading, put it,

“It is an intensive and all-encompassing teaching programme for the disciples!”

The watch word for all these stories are fear and faith. Today's gospel is a basic lesson in anxiety management. In Luke's version of this story it is just them and Jesus together in a boat sailing across a lake. A tranquil setting- what could possibly go wrong?

As the psalmist reminds us;

²³ *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;*

²⁴ *These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.*

²⁵ *For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.*

²⁶ *They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.*

²⁷ *They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end.*

²⁸ *Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*

²⁹ *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*

If they had been regular attenders at their local synagogue, the disciples may well have been familiar with these words as all of a sudden, the wind changes and there is trouble at sea. Panic sets in and the disciples, even though they are in the presence of Christ, the source of life, fear death. Whether we have faced a near death experience or not, we all know what it is to experience fear to a greater or lesser degree. It is debilitating to say the least and faith can sometimes seem to disappear just when we need it most.

Having spent time at sea as a Chaplain in the Royal Navy, I don't think the disciples woke Jesus up to rebuke the storm. I think they woke him because they were fed up that they were doing all this work bailing water and he was sound asleep in the back of the boat! "Wake up, Jesus! Help us bail out the water."

It is often the case that, when we go to Jesus with our problems, we present him with a solution that is not his, but ours dressed up to make us feel better.

Have you ever given the Lord orders about how to deal with a problem and he has chosen to ignore you? It is normally presented in what I call the "shopping list prayer"!

Perhaps we should reflect on the response of the disciples to their plea to Jesus. In the calm that followed, they were still afraid but this time for another reason. Their fear of the storm is overtaken by a different form of fear- they fear not the elements but rather the power of Christ, a fear tinged with awe and wonder. This is the fear that will lead to love: the love that when made perfect casts out all fear.

As St John reminds us;

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Amen.