

Luke 8:22-25

Genesis 2:4b-9,15-end; Revelation 4

I'm sure many of us have been aboard ships when they've been going through turbulent waters. It might have been on a ferry or even a cruise ship, when the seas got a bit choppy and the vessel began to gently sway from side to side – your drink sliding across the table - and you start to realise that yes, you are indeed at sea after all. A bad experience I once had of a ferry crossing on a school day trip to France has, I think, had a lasting effect on my enthusiasm (or rather lack of enthusiasm) for sailing. I don't think I've ever really recovered from the experience, such that even going on the short catamaran crossing from Portsmouth to Ryde makes me a bit queasy.

Any experiences *we* might have had of journeying in ships which have been tossed about by gale force winds, perhaps help us to understand something of what the disciples were going through in today's Gospel reading - though for them, of course, it would

have been infinitely more terrifying, given that they didn't have the benefit of the stabilisers and other advanced gadgetry which *our* seafaring vessels have *today*. In fact, though the sea was part of God's creation (along with trees, animals, birds and human beings), in Jewish thought it gradually came to be regarded as a great symbol of the forces of darkness / evil. But at the same time, if God created the sea, God could also tame the sea

Now on the surface, this incident is essentially a nature miracle. Here are the disciples crossing the Lake or Sea of Galilee, at the Lord's behest. A gale comes along and the disciples get into a panic because they think they're all about to die. In the midst of all this, Jesus is asleep. So they wake up Jesus, who they think is oblivious to what's happening, crying out to him in frustration, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" The Lord wakes up, rebukes the wind and the waves, all is calm again, and the disciples are left wondering who this man is, whom the wind and the waves obey.

When we look deeper at what's happening here, though, we discover that this amazing event that occurred on the lake speaks to us powerfully of the true identity of Jesus - who he *really* is - as well as what our response to him must be, in light of it.

So firstly, the calming of the storm points to the fact that Jesus is Lord over nature. Have you noticed here that Jesus actually *addresses* the wind and the waves – he rebukes them directly. It's reminiscent of the account of Creation at the very beginning of the Bible, where God *speaks* and the different elements of the physical universe come into being. In a similar way, Jesus *speaks* and the natural elements obey him. It's no wonder that after experiencing this, the disciples were left asking, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" – who indeed? And the answer is clear – Jesus *is* both fully human and fully *divine*. As the prologue to John's Gospel famously puts it, "He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him..." And so, if God has come among us in human form in the person of Jesus Christ, then this

same Jesus must naturally have sovereign power over nature - in this particular case, the sea, the great symbol of untameable disorder. The way in which Jesus demonstrates his power over nature here, points us to who he really *is*.

Indeed, the incident on the lake points even further to the fact that evil - the forces of darkness - will ultimately be defeated. In our reading from Revelation, we glimpse in the vision a sea of glass, like crystal, before the throne of God. At this point, it seems that the sea - that old symbol of chaos and evil - still poses a threat. But, by the time we get towards the close of the book - to chapter 21 - we find that the sea has gone - "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, *and the sea was no more.*" What's more, in the New Jerusalem which then comes down out of heaven from God, there is *no* more mourning or crying or pain, because God now dwells in the midst of his people. Evil is totally defeated.

And the second thing is that, if we have grasped who Jesus really is, then the only appropriate response must be to put our *faith* in him. Because the disciples had not yet fully grasped that Jesus was the divine Son of God, they failed to really put their trust in him, and so in the midst of the storm on the lake, they simply went into panic mode. And all the more so, when it was Jesus himself who had suggested in the first place that they venture across the lake, and yet here he was, asleep, apparently unaware of the danger they were facing. His relaxed attitude would no doubt have seemed to them quite inexplicable; after all, they believed it was inevitable that they were all about to die. That's why, after Jesus calms the wind and the waves, the question he puts to them addresses their sense of utter fear and despair – “Where is your faith?” The implication is that if they had faith, they would stop being so fearful. The thing is, Jesus expects those who want to follow him to be transformed from being faithless individuals, to being faithful – faith-filled - trusting disciples. The disciples ought to have realised that with Jesus resting in their midst they were perfectly safe - his

very presence among them was in itself surely all they needed to survive the storm.

Now there's a deep personal challenge for *us* in the midst of all this. Perhaps like the disciples on the lake, *we* still have some way to go when it comes to putting our trust in Jesus as Lord. But as with the first disciples, this doesn't usually happen overnight. *They* had to continue journeying on with Jesus, and as they did so, their faith in him and their recognition of who he really is continued to grow. And as *we* continue to journey along the way of discipleship, *we too* need to grow in our faith in Jesus and, in doing so, discover more and more of who he really is.

Now the word 'faith' can seem rather vague. So, it's important to realise that in the New Testament, having 'faith' isn't merely something intellectual, but more particularly it's about putting our trust *in* the Lord. We can stand and recite the Creed, declaring that we *believe* in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; but the crucial thing is, do we actually put our whole *trust* in God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

One of the alternative versions of the Creed emphasises this well when it says *this*:

‘Do you believe *and trust* in God the Father...’

‘Do you believe *and trust* in God the Son...’

‘Do you believe *and trust* in God the Holy Spirit...’

‘This is our faith. We believe *and trust* in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’

And that *trust* in the Lord must be something which sustains us through all the ‘ups and downs’ we go through in life. It’s one thing to trust in Jesus when things appear to be going smoothly, but what about those more turbulent times – when life’s journey takes us through more stormy conditions?

Well, the message which comes through loud and clear from the incident recounted in today’s Gospel reading is that Jesus *is* present with us through all that we have to go through in life. In the midst of our fears, he calls us to put our trust in *him*. Jesus was sharing in the lot of the disciples who were being engulfed by the storm, but he remained absolutely

serene in the face of the threatening chaos, because with him, the mighty waters will not have the last word.

The thing is, being a committed Christian isn’t about escaping from all the difficulties of life – our problems don’t suddenly disappear when we commit our life to Christ – far from it! Rather, knowing Jesus and knowing that he is present with us at all times, gives us a completely new perspective on all that we have to go through in life. The disciples had to go through that terrifying experience on the Sea of Galilee – there was no escaping it. But in going through this ordeal, they actually learnt a vital lesson of faith - that simply being with the Lord was enough. In fact, if this incident hadn’t occurred, the disciples would not have actually progressed any further in their understanding of who Jesus is and their need to put their trust in him. It’s so often the case that it’s when we travel through the more turbulent times in our lives that we grow in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The impression is often given in TV adverts or in the gossip magazines that life is all a 'bed of roses'. But, of course, we know that's all a delusion – we know that life isn't like that - and neither is the way of Christian discipleship like that. The thing is, as we put our trust more and more in Jesus, we will discover more about who he really is; and as we come to a clearer recognition of who he is, our faith and confidence in him will grow as we continue on our journey through life. So, as the well-known words of the old hymn put it:

Will *your* anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will *your* anchor drift or firm remain?

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, you know what difficulties each one of us are facing at this present time. Help us to know that you are with us in the midst of all that we are going through, and may we put our trust in you. Amen.