

Mark 4.39: Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: "Peace! Be still!"

Now that's climate change. Jesus suspends the laws of nature. He calms the storm, walks on water, feeds the five thousand, cures the sick. That unsettles us. That's not our world, is it? But our world is strong in explanations, but lacking in depth of understanding. "Words without knowledge", as the Lord rebukes Job in today's lesson. They weren't credulous fools two thousand years ago. What they saw in their experience was a battle between God and His Creation for control of the world; this had been going on since Eden. They did not have the luxury of a romantic view of the weather, and they could not do anything about it. Malign forces controlled the physical world. Only God's Son could be free from the tyranny of Nature, only He could bring back God's control over His Creation. Only he could sleep in a boat filling with water while a storm rages. Only He could "bind the restless wave". They knew that.

Reading this story slowly, I found myself wondering, under what circumstances would we be unafraid as a storm gathers strength and threatens to sink the boat? The answer to that riddle might be this. We would be unafraid if we led the life of the Son of God, if we had embraced the poverty of renouncing all concern for ourselves at the innermost core of our being, if we were instead "alive with the life of God", as St Peter says. The disciples, who are usually comic stand-ins for us, hadn't reached that point. They are happy to follow Jesus while the going is good, a day pilgrimage to Galilee, coach ticket paid on line, everything arranged in advance, nice service on the beach, but then the plans change, "as evening drew on" which means the beginning of a new day, because their day began at sundown. After all that teaching comes the unexpected practical. (That's parish life for you.) "Let us go to the other side", Jesus says, and the storm strikes. The problem, the danger revealed in this Gospel, is not the storm. They knew there could be sudden storms on the Sea of Galilee. The problem is the attitude of the disciples, our attitude most of the time; they felt they had to be in control of everything that happened to them. The storm stands for loss of control. Superior forces threaten to take over. No wonder this story came to be seen as a paradigm of the persecuted Church. Until our safety is threatened. we are content to leave Jesus asleep in our lives, so that we can get on with living on our own terms.

Every life has its storms. There are the sudden squalls of personal tragedy and loss, the waves that break over us in serious illness, the massive cyclone of Covid which imposed new controls upon us; Job's afflictions can be ours. Then there are the storms we manage to whip up within ourselves, which others might never see because they are our secrets, our anger, our addictions, painful memories and regrets which don't go away. So we experience storms, without and within. But just as the contemporaries of Jesus were not credulous, nor need we be today. Just because we're Christians does not mean that all these storms will suddenly dissipate, that with Jesus awake in our boat, in our lives, all these stormy experiences will be reversed. It's not my experience anyway. But I'll tell you what might happen. Storms may rage, but we can try to find the calm at the centre of the storm, the calm which followed when Jesus said to the sea, "Peace, be still". This is the Christian way. Here, revealed to us as Christ's newest disciples, are poverty of spirit and simplicity of life. "...as dying, and behold we live ..as having nothing, and yet possessing everything", as Paul taught the Corinthians today. We die to self, or rather we integrate our selves with Jesus and his response to his Father's love. What happens then, if we can be patient and mostly faithful, is that our emptiness attracts God's fullness. God lives within us. Then we see our world of storms and sunlight differently. We see a world transformed, transfigured by the love of the Creator, Creation no

longer in rebellion against God. God is to be found in the storm. The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. I said God lives within us. But a better way of putting this is that we find we live in God, for God is everywhere, even in our storms. Jesus wakes in the boat, he awakes within us, or perhaps I could say, we find in ourselves an awakening mind, the Holy Spirit at work, the same consciousness of God's protection and presence that Jesus had and still has today.

We come to this church to see, and to be, signs of the Kingdom of God, in bread that is broken, in wine poured from a cup that contains the storms of the world. God knows we have our fears with us to the end of our lives, concerned as we always are with our own journey and safety. But life's not just about that. Life is a gift, not our private possession. St Augustine, in his uncanny way, confronts us over this: "... your heart is upset, as if it were you in the boat. Why? .. rouse Christ in your heart, let your faith awaken and your conscience will be quieted and your ship will be freed." The Stilling of the Storm is the miracle you and I can perform each day in Christ's name in a real world of fear and danger, death and resurrection, for as God's servants, St Paul says today, however imminent shipwreck might be, we can find the holiness of spirit, genuine love, and the power of God Himself, to take the Gospel of peace to others, while the storms rage. As we shall sing in our Communion hymn:

Save us, for still the tempest raves,
Save, lest we sink beneath the waves:
Sweet Sacrament of rest.

Fr. Julian Browning