

The Third Sunday after Trinity, 16 June 2024, Year B, Family Eucharist
Readings: Job 38.1-11 and Mark 4.35-end

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. (Psalm 19.14)

Today's gospel the *Stilling of the Storm* is given for the edification of the faithful. The clue is in how the disciples address Jesus during the storm. They address him as Teacher! Over the last few weeks while we have been considering Mark's gospel, we already noted that Jesus by his actions which includes his ministry of forgiveness and healing teaches us about who he is and what he desires for us.

The picture of Jesus asleep while the storm rages all around him is a picture drawn of God many times by the Hebrew people in their ancient writings. Many times the Hebrew people ask the disciples' question posed here – a God who they perceive as uncaring even indifferent to their plight. The image of God sleeping and not rousing himself from his slumber is a biblical image we encounter again and again. 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' And again and again God will have to remind people of what he has done for them.

It is an extraordinary question the disciples ask because Jesus has come with healing in his wings ministering (Malachi 4:2) to all who come to him. Already in Mark's gospel he has shown he cares. Actually he cares deeply. The disciples turn to Jesus in their need, as we all do. But their turning to him comes with an accusation. It is an affront, given what has already transpired. How can you sleep while we are perishing?

It is a question we are prone to ask for ourselves today, but no longer mainly as a **WE** question, but as an **I** question, 'Teacher, do you not care that I am perishing?' And it is this question that unmasks us as **now** persons and **now** people.

To place an emphasis on the **now** is important given that the disciples have been witnesses to Jesus' ministry up to this point. They have seen people come from near and far to be healed by

him. They have heard him engage with the Pharisees as well as the Scribes from Jerusalem. They have listened to his parables. They might have learnt by now that he does care...

The point I am making is a simple one. When a crisis strikes **we forget** what has gone before. **Amnesia sets in**. What matters is now! Not what was! This is understandable, but not wise, I venture to say. What we have already learnt in our walk with God seemingly vanishes like morning mist (Hosea 13:3). In our faith journey we must build on what we have already experienced and come to know.

There is an invitation to the Lord's Prayer that I welcomed when it was first introduced, because I with others detected in the church in general, amongst the faithful a lack of trust in God, a lack of confidence in God. You will be familiar with "Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us, Our Father, ..., thy kingdom come."

But how can we move from a place of faltering steps in faith to a place of confidence in the faith given? Less focus on self and more focus on God would be the most succinct answer. I have seen too many and one would be too many falter during my time amongst you and alongside others. Confidence is built by a faithful walk with God through the trials and tribulations of this life always mindful of God's teaching in Christ. Acting on it. Living by it. Staying the course. Confidence is built walking faithfully with God through the joys and celebrations of this life, while always giving thanks to God by acknowledging our blessings, which are like the sand on the seashore.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. Oh Yeah?! Really! I do see people tossed about. And there are too many! I hope they know where to turn when the storm rages? Confidence is built on achieving perspective by learning and growing in confidence that God is turned towards us. Who does care! We begin from a place that God cares for us whether we be waking or sleeping.

This is what the Stilling of the Storm moment in Mark's gospel is wanting to teach us. But Jesus has a question for us. He actually has two. Jesus does still the storm. He does care! "Peace! Be

still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. [Pause] He asks, "Why are you afraid? [Pause] Have you still no faith!"

John Newton in his best known hymn could write, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear." Can we echo those words, I wonder?

I am going to seek and address a little the first question, the question of fear against the troubling backdrop of our world at this time for which our faith is forever equipping us! Because I do have faith or I believe to have faith. As we sang last Sunday in the opening hymn, "All my hope on God is founded he doth still my trust renew! Clever that phrase with its juxtaposition. He doth **still** my trust renew, by **stilling** the storm...

Since before the first millennium of the Common Era people have been predicting the end of the world filling people with fear. While others would ascertain that the New Testament came to be written at a time of crisis when Jesus failed to come again in their lifetime, the lifetime of the apostles. Since at least 9/11 I have consistently said, WE are always in crisis! But you don't have to listen to me. All of us whether we realise it or not live in the shadow of the 20th century with its two world wars, the atrocities committed under its shadow and the atrocities committed since. Consider, if you can stomach it, two massacres. The first was committed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975-79 with 1.3 million killed or the Rwandan genocide of 1994/95 with a least a half million killed possibly 880,000 to name but two.

What do I most fear? Humankind, summed up in the phrase coined by Robert Burns, "Man's inhumanity to man, makes countless thousands mourn." What causes me concern? Our ever growing separation from the living God! Our refusal to acknowledge sin and our part in it. The storm is real. It doth rage. We are in crisis and we shall ever be in crisis. Where do we turn? With the disciples I for one turn to God for as we sang last Sunday, "All my hope on God is founded, he doth still my trust renew... Christ doth call one and all: ye who follow shall not fall."

Amen.