

He is with us in the storm

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Pentecost + 4B 20/6/21: Mark 4.35-41

Ps 107.²⁸ ...they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress;

²⁹ he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

³⁰ Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

This is a fascinating story – a story about going over to the other side with Jesus.

All day, Jesus has been teaching huge crowds – teaching in parables that have intrigued his listeners and bewildered his disciples. Now he sets off. The job seems incomplete, but there's a sense of urgency; he must move on. Jesus has been exhausted by the effort of all his teaching, all those people, and in the boat, he falls into a very deep sleep.

Just how deep becomes apparent when a storm springs up so violent that the boat threatens to founder. His disciples panic and wake him, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?"

Jesus stills the storm. He is independent of their faith – sovereign over the great forces of nature. And the disciples, overcome with awe ask one another, "Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him!" Who can this be? That is the great question Mark's Gospel confronts us with. But for now, we're on their way to the other side with Jesus.

When we read on from this point, we'll find that the *other*

side is a 'liminal' place; out on the fringe of civilization. On the other side, they are met by a man living in a graveyard and possessed by an unclean spirit named legion; nearby are pigs; pigs in their thousands. The other side is a place where no decent person should be. But Jesus has gone there, and we, his disciples have accompanied him.

To choose to belong with Jesus means to get up and go where he leads. And that is quite likely to mean a journey towards something that is other.

That's something we think about in this Trinity season: we are shown that we reflect God the Trinity through our diversity. God isn't content just to let us sit and get pot bound in our small corners. God wants us to be open to each other – to other ways of seeing – to various ways of being God's children.

Last weekend, Vicky and I had the privilege of experiencing this when we went walking on Adnyamathanha Country with Auntie Rev Dr Denise Champion and her niece/daughter Rhanee. They took us to the places of dreamtime stories which they told us in situ – stories which Auntie Denise, Adnyamathanha elder and Christian minister, wove with Biblical stories and applied to our own lives. We were being welcomed to places where western Christianity would never have dreamt of going. We found Jesus to have been present in the Dreamtime. Who is this that even the barriers of culture and tens of millennia submit to?

God wants us to be a community with a hospitality that welcomes otherness; not with the sort that calls otherness in and tries to make it become like us. God wants us to let our hospitality change us.

To choose to belong with Jesus means to get up and go where he leads. And that is quite likely to mean a journey towards something that is *other*.

And today's fascinating Gospel story is a picture for us of

just how *other* it can get. All that was normal, pure, orderly and safe – that all lay back on the familiar shore. Come wind and high water, Jesus was going to see us on another one. The choice to belong with Jesus means to get up and go where he leads.

Each of us here has made that choice, or will make it. Why do we go with him on this journey? Curiosity? Attraction? Faith? To have a look? To be near?

When we were baptised, Jesus called us to go with him – to cross the water to the other side. Is there danger in this? Are there storms? Yes, there are; certainly in any Christian's life, there will be. The sudden pain in the night; the shock loss of a job, the unexpected death of a partner or friend; on a mass scale, pandemic or war – or in the case of first Australians, worse still – ongoing cultural genocide. Yet there is someone who will never let us face that alone; one who always accompanies us, who embarks on our every journey, absolutely with us even where others can be no more than onlookers and friends.

But we should pray for each other in all this, and today's gospel story reminds us to do this, and gives us our prayer. "Who is this ..."

The other point is make sure that whatever we do and wherever we go – whatever happens – we are to make sure we're with him...with Jesus...because then it will be alright.

It will be alright not because of any special faith we have – he's independent of our faith; not because of any special favour any of us enjoys – he loves all. It will be alright because of who Jesus is, the one whom the sea and the wind obey. Danger, pain, even death may come. But he is the one who knows the way, and Jesus can come even from the other side of our death to be our companion on the way.

Jesus came to be with us in the storms of our lives, and he is

with us still through the Spirit living within and among us. Know that, and look for him. Jesus knows these storms personally. Tell him how your storms affect you; he will hear and understand and never leave you to weather them alone.

Sometimes God calms the storm. Sometimes God lets the storm rage, and calms the child. Either way, Christ is with you; Christ is with us. Amen

Prayer of the day

This is based on the Gospel reading from Mark where Jesus stilled the storm and the fears of his disciples . In awe they asked...

*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?
Let us pray for all who are weathering storms in their lives*

We pray for the world

For all trapped in poverty, famine, drought or the effects of natural disasters

For all battling Covid 19 in so many countries, with or without sufficient vaccine

For all living in areas of war or civil conflict where safety is never a 'given'

We think particularly today of the peoples in Northern Ireland and Afghanistan

We pray for all for whom life is an endless struggle just to get through another day

May they sense your sustaining presence and power

God whom the wind and sea obey ... hear our prayer

We pray for the church worldwide

For those in peril of persecution because of their faith

For those suffering imprisonment because of their faith

For those faith is sorely tested by unexpected difficulties or troubles

Help them we pray, to sense your calming presence and power

God whom the wind and sea obey hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves, our families and friends, and the communities in which we live

For those whose jobs are threatened, and who struggle to pay the rent or the mortgage

For those swamped by the demands of work or the responsibilities of care, whether it be the care of grandchildren or elderly parents or sick friends

We can never forget those living in hidden abusive relationships

Nor those living lonely lives, without support or encouragement

When we feel overwhelmed by worries and fears

still our souls that we may sense your calming presence and power

God whom the wind and sea obey hear our prayer

We pray for all who are sick, especially those who are suffering or close to dying

For those living with chronic pain, mental torment or stress about medical results

We remember those who are grieving, wondering how to go on without their loved one

When we feel overwhelmed by pain or loss

Broken and tossed about in any direction

Calm our souls we pray that we may sense your calming presence and power.

God whom the wind and sea obey hear our prayer

As we begin Refugee Week, we give thanks that the Sri Lankan family have been reunited in Peth and we pray for the recovery of little Tharnicaa

May they be free to live wherever they choose in Australia, albeit on a temporary visa.

We pray for the thousands of others living on temporary visas

*with no secure future, often separated from their families,
their lives in an endless limbo*

*We remember too the millions living in refugee camps who know
they and their children may never leave the camps because the
world is unable or unwilling to resettle them.*

May they sense your sustaining power and strength

God whom the wind and sea obey hear our prayer

We pray for those who have died

*Remembering especially those whose death has been violent or
untimely*

and those who have died unlamented or unloved

When we are overwhelmed by the storms of life

When we come to face our own death

Calm our terrors and still our souls

*And by your power bring us into the joy of your eternal
presence*

Adapted from Let us Pray by Janet Nelson

Intercessions following the Revised Common Lectionary

