

# Trust in God's presence

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Pentecost + 5b – Mark 4 35-41



*In 1986, the hull of an ancient fishing boat was recovered from the western shore of Lake Galilee. Carbon dating shows it was from around Jesus' time. The boat is about 8.1 metres long, 2.3 metres wide, and 1.4 metres high. It was flat bottomed and decked fore and aft, with room for around 15 people, four of them rowing when sails weren't in use. It may have been in a boat like this that Jesus and the disciples crossed Lake Galilee – Jesus sleeping maybe on the stern deck, or sheltered under it.* <sup>v. 38</sup>

Today we're in a boat on Lake Galilee. We've set sail for the other side, and all looks fine. We've done this so often, it's just routine; just like starting a new day at school or work. We set our course; we know what to expect; we'll be fine. But suddenly we're not; suddenly everything's different; everything is terrifying. A fearful storm has suddenly blown up, and we feel frightened and cut off. No-one can hear our

cries for help; we're far from safety. How can God let this happen to us? Is God asleep somewhere; does God care?

For some of us, the storm might be different. Our storm may come as a sudden, frightening pain in the night; or when the doctor tells us our life can't be the way we planned it any more. For some, our storm comes suddenly when the job we thought we had is no more. For some children and adults, the storm strikes us when someone we thought cared for us—someone we thought would stick by us—suddenly doesn't any more, they hurt us or go away. Or maybe someone we imagined was going to live all our life suddenly dies.

But how can these things be called storms? What's this storm got to do with our lives? This storm can be an analogy for the sorts of things can threaten my life or yours like this storm threatened Jesus and his friends. When storms strike us, we feel alone and vulnerable. We feel like God's gone away, or gone to sleep. And we ask the question that Jesus disciples asked him as they woke him up. Don't you care? We're all going to die!

We've heard the story. He does wake up, and he tells the wind and the sea to calm down. Then he asks them why they're afraid, and do they have any faith at all? But they don't seem to hear this. They're wondering about something else. "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?!" I think anybody would ask that question; and there's really only one answer. Only God can tell the wind and the sea what to do.

But that's not the whole story. Let's just go back into the story a bit. Jesus, asleep in the boat, was so tired that even a great storm couldn't wake him. He'd been looking after crowds of people for days. One day he didn't even have time to eat. And yet, as he was teaching all those people, there were others telling anyone who'd listen that he was evil. And his family was nagging him to come back home and get real. He'd been fighting an up-hill battle. No wonder he was exhausted.

So we have in our boat the one who can command the wind and the sea; and we know only God can do that. But that same person in our boat is so exhausted, he escapes crowds and then sleeps through a storm that terrifies experienced sailors. And that's a vulnerable human being. In our boat with us is the God who can command the weather and also in our boat with us is our teacher Jesus, who gets tired, just like anybody else. And they're one and the same person!

For me that's the unnoticed miracle in this story; God and you and I are all in the same boat. God is in our boat because that exhausted teacher is asleep in the boat with us; because Jesus chooses to be with us; to be one of us. We tend to think of the miracle of this story being that Jesus calms the storm. But maybe we could think of it as the miraculous story of how God shares our storms with us; how God is in the same boat with us. See this, and our life's storms are very different things.

There's a wonderful painting of this story by Rembrandt. I think he painted the exact moment of Jesus' command to the wind and waves. Jesus is sitting in the back of the boat with a few of his disciples looking at him. It's a still point in a wild scene. The water around the back of the boat seems calmer than it is everywhere else. The sail nearest to Jesus has relaxed a bit. But at the front of the boat, the storm is still blowing with full force; one sail is drum tight, the other is torn and standing straight out in the wind with a shredded rope whipping around above it. And the sailors there are hanging on for grim death; they look terrified.

What this painting says – what this story says – is this. Jesus came to be with us in the storms of our lives. Know that, and look for him. Jesus knows our storms. Tell him how your storms affect you; he'll hear and understand. Sometimes God calms the storm, sometimes God lets the storm rage, and calms the child.

Let's pray. In times of storm and in places of calm, God, we give thanks for being with us. In calls to go and in calls to stay put, God, we give you thanks for being with us. May we trust in your presence; trust your love because of Jesus. Amen.