



Sunday 23rd June 2023

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Mark 4.35-41

Jesus Calms the Storm

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Other Readings: 1 Samuel 17.[1a,4-11,19-23]32-49 Psalm 9.9-20

Or 1 Samuel 17.57 - 18.5, 10-16, Psalm 133 2 Corinthians 6.1-13

Homily

Today’s gospel *miracle* – the calming of the storm - sits after an account of several *parables* that Jesus related to His disciples and to their followers. In chapter four of Mark there is firstly the parable of the sower where seeds fell on both poor and good soil. That is followed by the story of the lamp under the bushel whose light is hidden by its covering. Then comes the parable of the growing seed and then the parable of the mustard seed. That’s the one where the point is that great things – large trees - grow out of tiny things such as seeds. Finally in chapter four we have today’s gospel story – Jesus miraculously stills a storm. Importantly also in chapter four, Mark relates Jesus’ teaching on the purpose of parables. What style! After the bunch of parables, we have the first of four powerful miracles to confirm the truth of what precedes it! I think that to ‘get’ any of the four miracles; we must understand Jesus’ teaching in the parables. Jesus had the following explanatory conversation but only with His disciples. Furthermore, Mark suggests that they were every bit as confused as the wider audience; their level of understanding of what they were hearing and what they were witnessing was, well, not very ‘on the ball!’ Jesus did respond to the

disciples' requests for an explanation of the parables. I think they probably weren't expecting to be told "to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God."

What did He mean by that? Jesus says to all, in every age, who come within the reach of His gospel, "Those who come to me with a sincere heart and a simple desire to know the truth, as you, my apostles, are doing, to you I will reveal the mysteries of my kingdom, and I will help you onwards in the path of holiness, by which you may at length attain to the heavenly kingdom. But those people who do not have this pure desire for truth, but indulge only in their own lusts and errors, from them that little knowledge of God and of Divine things that they have will by degrees be taken away, and they will become altogether blind." Here, for all people of goodwill, we have a reminder of what the Christian life needs to look like.

Let's look at the gospel story itself. Perhaps for Mark, the storm reflects the post-Easter and post-Ascension experience of the early church. Those disciples ran into all sorts of problems and perhaps felt that the Lord had abandoned them. This miracle tells us that the disciples were summoned to have faith in His continuing presence with them and His continuing care for them. The idea of 'control' helps us to understand this miracle. As the boat rocked and the waves mounted, the disciples probably felt that they were in charge, in control, of the voyage, even if only just! However, when they realised that the boat was on the point of sinking, things were out of control and so beyond their powers. They must have felt terrified. It is at precisely times like this that we discover the extent of our own faith. Would we, along with the disciples. Would we feel that we had been abandoned and that God doesn't care for us in our times of extreme stress? We have our own storms; some are more substantial than others. I guess that they might range from an inconvenient delay on a journey by car or train or bus to tragedy around the life and death of ourselves and/or those we love. For the early church, this miracle was a very relevant one. The boat represented the church and the storm the persecutions of its members. God is very much more than a simple lifebelt that is useful in a crisis but otherwise irrelevant to one's life. When things are normal, we may feel that we have a strong faith. But it is only when things are out of control, perhaps, that we have an insight into how much faith we really have. Then, we must know how to turn to God and trust that He will see us through it. Of course, this is exactly what happened to the early church. He did see them through it and that is why we are able to share in this reflection today, two thousand years later.

Conversation Questions

1. *Have you ever seen yourself in the same position as the disciples in the boat?*
2. *What might you say to those terrified sailors?*
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

O God, the protector of all who trust in you,
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
increase and multiply upon us your mercy;
that with you as our ruler and guide
we may so pass through things temporal
that we lose not our hold on things eternal;
grant this, heavenly Father,
for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Gracious Father,
by the obedience of Jesus
you brought salvation to our wayward world:
draw us into harmony with your will,
that we may find all things restored in him,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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