

Homily for Pentecost 4, 2021

Mark 4:35-41

'A great storm to a great calm'

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TEXT – Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

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INTRODUCTION

'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'

That's the question the disciples asked Jesus in the middle of this great storm,
Having woken him from his sleep.

It's a curious question to ponder.

Because it implies he can do something to help,

And yet at the same time they accuse him of a lack of care and concern for them.

Isn't it the case that our problems in life often feel even worse,
when those close to us don't treat them with the same seriousness?

We feel like we're sinking,
And someone gives us the impression they think it's no big deal.

Sometimes we feel this way towards God,

'...do you not care that we are perishing?'

By the end of the text their question changes though,

They ask each other,
'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Who indeed?

When you discover the true answer to that question,

When you trust in that one,

You'll find the peace and stillness Jesus brings to the chaos and threats this world throws at you.

Who then is this?,

Let's look to the text to find three answers today.

First, Jesus is Lord of creation.

Second, Jesus is a Lord to be feared.

And third, Jesus is a Lord who saves.

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JESUS IS LORD OF CREATION

First, we see here that Jesus is the Lord of creation.

The situation the disciples find themselves in is, of course, a ferocious storm.

*'A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat,
so that the boat was already being swamped.'*

I wonder,
Have you ever been caught out in a great storm?

If you have you know it's no joke,

Let alone if you're on a big body of water in a fishing boat.

Can you recall that unique and chilling sound a serious storm can make,
The wind howling,
The rain crashing.

That sound that can really strike a unique sort of terror into little children,
And perhaps into some adults too.

To this very day,
There is something about great weather events,
that powerfully reminds us of how little control we human beings really have over our circumstances.

If there's an earthquake out there in the ocean,

We've developed wonderful technology which can help warn coastal communities of a possible tsunami,

But we are nowhere near,
Actually, being able to stop the water coming.

That's why in the Bible,

One of the things it means for God to be the creator of this world,

Is that he is ultimately the only one who has authority over this creation.

Did you hear this in our Old Testament reading and Psalm today?

In the book of Job,

The Lord responds to Job out of the great whirlwind – the great storm,

This is right toward the end of Job when he's has been lamenting his suffering,
Even challenging God,

And the Lord responds by emphasizing that God is God,
and Job is not.

He says,
'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?'

In other words,

Job can't possibly know the big picture when it comes to making sense of his own suffering,
Only God can truly know that.

And to really drive this point home the Lord says:
'...who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?'

The picture is of creation,

That God brought order to the chaotic waters,
Boundaries for the sea and dry land.

And this is fundamentally important for human beings to know,

That this creation is not under our control,

Storms should remind us of our creatureliness and finitude.

There's a famous story, legend perhaps,

Of a Christian King Canute who ruled Denmark, Sweden and England in the 11th century.

His advisers were flattering him and his power,

And so the story goes Canute set his throne by the sea shore and commanded the incoming tide to stop,
and not wet his robes.

The tide of course continued to come in as normal,

And so the King was reported as saying:

*'Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings,
for there is none worthy of the name,
but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.'*

Only the Lord God has authority over his creation.

And here then is the rather obvious but hugely significant point in our text...

Jesus is the Lord of creation!

The disciples don't pray to God in heaven to save them,
like in the psalm,

The disciples don't wake Jesus up and ask **him** to pray to the Lord like the pagan sailors did with Jonah,

The disciples go to Jesus,

Jesus himself exercises authority over the unruly creation.

*'He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'
Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*

Who then is this?

Only the Lord himself can speak to his creation like he's calming down a worked-up child.

This is really the big point of this text,

That this man,
Jesus of Nazareth,

This is the Lord now among us in human flesh,

This is the Son of God through whom all things came into being,
Through whom the waters of creation were given their boundaries,

Now restoring peace and stillness to the disorder of what he made.

Jesus is the Lord of creation.

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JESUS IS A LORD TO BE FEARED

Number 2,
Who then is this?

Jesus is a Lord to be **feared**.

Did you hear the interesting play on fear in this text?

After Jesus rebukes the storm,

He has another mild rebuke of sorts,
You could say,
Now to his disciples:

He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'

We all know that fear is such a powerful driving force in our lives don't we?

We reflected earlier on the experiences of fear we may have had in literal storms,

But then there are all sorts of situations in our lives of which we are afraid, aren't there?

And Jesus says there is a connection between a certain type of fear and faith.

There is a sense in which we can see behind some of our fears a lack of faith,

And faith, in this sense, is something of the antidote to fear.

But then it gets a little more complicated than that.

Because then we don't read that the disciples were filled with great faith,

But we read that the disciples reacted with **another** type of fear.

Our text said:

'...they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this...'

Literally it says *'they feared a great fear...'*

So they've had this experience of fright and panic in relation to the storm,

But now Jesus calming of the storm means that fear is re-shaped and re-directed,

I think properly redirected,

To Jesus himself.

In this sense of fear,

As awe and reverence before the Lord Jesus as God almighty in human flesh,

This isn't the **opposite** of faith,

But you could say,

Is as **aspect** of faith itself.

Many of you learnt this from Luther's catechism in the old days,

That *'we should fear and love God...'*

Not that we should be frightened of God as if he's somehow out to get us,

But we should have a right **awe** for who he is as the almighty creator of heaven and earth,

And who we are as his creatures.

Again, that's what Job was being reminded of in our Old Testament reading.

It really does seem to me,

That this is something Christians in our time need to take more seriously.

Too often modern Christians have treated the Lord Jesus as if he is a big spiritual teddy bear,

Just my best buddy,

Who would never do or say anything to challenge me.

I had a whole conversation with students at the Uni,

And they were saying that it seems to them they've been introduced to something of a sanitized Jesus at times,

And as they read the Gospels now,
they discover there's more to him.

One thinks of the famous line in the Narnia when Lucy is being told about Aslan,

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"

... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ...

"Who said anything about safe? "

Course he isn't safe. But he's good.

He's the King, I tell you."

Yes Jesus is gentle and kind,
Yes Jesus is full of compassion and love,

But he is also the Lord who is to be **feared**.

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JESUS IS A LORD WHO SAVES

Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

He's the Lord of creation,

He's a Lord to be feared,

And finally,
He's a Lord who **saves**.

Jesus displays his authority over his creation,

But he doesn't do it from the *beach*,

He doesn't do it for *spectators*,

He does it from the boat with and **for** his disciples.

He does it because his disciples are in danger.

He does it because **despite** their confusion about his sleeping,

He **does** care for them,
As he cares for you,

he has come to **save** them,

as he's come to save you.

Remember his question to them?

'Have you still no faith?'

He's calling them to trust him,
He's calling **you** to trust him.

Do you remember when Jonah slept on the boat?

How they finally dealt with that storm?

Jonah was thrown overboard,
into the depths,
Into the darkness,
Into death itself,
In a sense,

and the storm was stilled.

And after three days Jonah came up into the light of day.

Well in this storm Jesus isn't thrown into the depths,

Because his time has not yet come.

But Jesus said,
the only sign given to that generation would be the sign of Jonah,

That,
*'just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,
so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'.* Matthew 12:40

At this point in the Gospels,
he's only going to save the disciples **temporarily** from this **one** event of chaos and darkness,

But finally on the cross,

Jesus will be plunged into the depths of God's judgment on our sin,
He will enter the darkness of chaos and evil,
He will be engulfed by death itself,

And he did that all for you,

He's not only your creator,

He's your saviour,

And after three days he rose again to new life,

So that no matter what threats you face in this life,

No matter what turmoil you find yourself in,

Jesus is still in the boat with you,

He still brings his word of peace and stillness today.

As so often,

The hymn writers capture it best:

*'Be still my soul, Your God will undertake,
To guide the future as he has the past,
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake,
All now mysterious shall be clear at last.
Be still my soul, the tempests still obey,
His voice, who ruled them once on Gaillee.'*

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CONCLUSION

'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Jesus is Lord,

He's the Lord of creation,

He's a Lord to be rightly feared,

He's the Lord who saves.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.