

## Sermon for 20<sup>th</sup> June – Trinity 3 by Jane Brough

Our Old Testament reading is the account of David and Goliath. Fear on the part of Saul and the Israelites is a strand that runs throughout the reading. The Philistines and Israelites prepare to do battle, Goliath, the Philistine champion issues the challenge for a duel to the death. David, still a shepherd boy, hears his words and he volunteers to fight Goliath and without any armour, and he kills him with a stone from his sling. Demonstrating you can do wonderful things when the Lord is with you and you put your trust in him. Fear on the part of Saul and the Israelites runs throughout the reading and both of our readings invite us to deepen our trust in God, for he alone has the power to save us and to calm every storm we might face.

Most people who visit the Holy Land on pilgrimage are struck by the beauty and simplicity of Galilee, the region where Christianity was born. For many pilgrims the most memorable time of their visit is a quiet walk on the shores of the Sea of Galilee or a journey by boat between the lakeside towns. In the stillness you can hear the echo of so many of Jesus' words, which were spoken around the shores of the lake. The surrounding countryside gives you a sense of place for many of the familiar stories about Jesus and your faith and imagination can fill in the deserted place with people who still long to see Jesus. In a curious way, even though Galilee is a foreign place to visitors, Christians are struck by a sense of belonging to this place. Visiting Galilee is like going home and discovering it for the first time.

After he left his home in Nazareth, Jesus settled in the town of Capernaum on the west shore of the sea of Galilee. Unlike Nazareth which was isolated from the main roads, Jesus' new home was on the main route from Damascus to Egypt and would have served as a good base for the ministry. Capernaum was a customs post, merchants and traders would have stopped there, no doubt exchanging goods and stories. For the locals, warm climate and the fertile soil made for plentiful crops including figs and grapes and olives. In addition to all the fruit growing and farming the lake industries included trading, tanning, fishing and boat building. Most of Jesus' ministry in Galilee was around the shores of the lake. He spoke of the sea, the land around it, the people who lived in the region. He used Peter's boat as his pulpit when the crowds became too large, and he crossed the lake many times no doubt with Peter as his captain.

In today's Gospel, Jesus suggests to his disciples that they cross the lake to the other side. The sun has set, soon it will be nightfall. The pressing crowds are left behind, but what lies ahead is no picnic. The lake is normally calm, but because of its position – about seven hundred feet below sea level - it is subject to sudden windstorms which sweep down from the surrounding hills, rush through the narrow gorges that break upon the lake and whip up the water like the sea. This is what happens in today's Gospel, the rapid change of weather causes the waves to break into the boat so that it starts to fill.

In the midst of this chaos, Jesus is fast asleep on the small bench at the back of the boat, his head on a cushion. The disciples have no intention of letting Jesus doze through a disaster, the boat is sinking and perhaps like most fishermen, the disciples cannot swim to save their lives. They wake Jesus with an accusation "Master do you not care? We are going down!" Jesus wakes up, rebukes the wind and commands the sea to be quiet. After rebuking the tempest Jesus rebukes his disciples for their large fear and little faith. In the midst of the calm there arises the central question about Jesus "who then is this?" The question about Jesus' identity arises from seeing what Jesus actually does. People begin to wonder about who Jesus is when they witness what he does. If everyone had been washed overboard, for example the question would not have arisen. The question is posed, the answer however will be understood only after the resurrection.

We believe with St Mark that the answer to the question "who is this man?" is that he is the Son of God. That proclamation of the identity of Jesus is at the heart of our Christian Creed. But the question remains whether our faith in Jesus will stay with us even during threat and danger and storm. The experience of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee is a graphic one, they feel all at sea, they feel up to their neck in difficulty, they feel powerless to withstand the environment of threat. For sure, their experience is not alien to us as our World is experiencing at the moment.

We believe that Jesus accompanies us on our journey to God, that he is on board with us. Sometimes when we see such disorder and chaos around our World, we might wonder if Jesus has chosen to sleep through disaster, even though we know that his presence is insurance against our own fear and anxiety. To journey with Jesus is to journey through storms, not around them. The peace of our Galilees will be disturbed. But we know that the disciples of Jesus went on to face shipwreck and hardship and rejection. Ultimately, many of them came face to face with violence, death and martyrdom. What kept them going is what keeps us going a strenuous belief that Jesus is Lord of all chaos, a stubborn faith which tells us that there is no storm that will not be stilled at least by the peace of his presence. In the meantime, we struggle on and hold onto our hats! Amen