

## Sermon for 20 February – Psalm 65, Luke 8:22-25 (Rev Lin Vawer)

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.*

A very famous poem by John Masefield that I think I learned for A levels many moons ago, so many moons that I am not surprised that I could only remember the first two lines.

I do like the sea in all its many forms. My sister and her husband have a small cottage in Wales and I love opening the front door and looking down to the sea or sitting at the back and just being able to hear it. It is endlessly fascinating – sulky and seductive, beckoning and threatening. It reminds us of the forces within it that has both the potential for beauty and destruction. In many ways it offers its own liturgy of chaos and creation, judgment and salvation and like all good liturgy it draws us into its rhythm. It is powerful.

The second half of Luke's gospel shows Jesus exhibiting his power in different ways.

In today's reading Jesus calms a storm, and we see his power over the **natural order**. Later on, in the gospel in the exorcism of the Gerasene demon, he shows his power over the **spiritual order**. Then the woman with the haemorrhage is healed and he demonstrates power over the **physical order**. The climax is the raising of Jairus daughter where we see his power over **death**.

The watchwords for each event – **fear and faith**

The tragedy of *The Titanic* takes more than 3 hours of film time you unfold. Sailors recounting their storms must run into thousands of column inches of. Yet in just 119 words Luke gives us an extraordinarily powerful, vivid and significant account of a storm. And the disciples find themselves at the very beginning of an intensive and all-encompassing teaching programme.

They have seen miracles, outcasts included, heard controversial teaching so perhaps there was a bit of relief that Jesus just wants to get in a boat and do something as ordinary as to go across the lake. As Jesus falls asleep maybe the disciples felt even more relieved. Here is Jesus totally human, sharing our ordinariness. Sharing our lives to the fullest, worn out as we are worn out and safe among friends – relaxed enough to sleep. Teacher, friend, a real man, one of them. One of us. Feeling safe, in control.

All is calm, tranquil what can possibly go wrong?

**The sleeping Jesus is one of us and yet .....**

It is a curious thing about our relationship with God. We want God to be powerful, but we also want that power used in a way that we can understand, in a way that seems safe, in a way, perhaps, that we can control, or at least doesn't leave us feeling out of control.

But to be in relationship with God is to be out of control. God isn't a part of our life in this world, God *is* life in this world. God isn't just another being in the universe. God *is* being. And there's no controlling life itself, being itself.

**Lesson one – the disciples are not in control and neither are we.**

A storm brews up, there is trouble at sea and the disciples get their lesson in anxiety management. As fishermen the disciples would know all about storms, but this is tough, it's one that fills them with fear and required all their skills. All hands on deck so maybe they just wanted Jesus to help them, stand alongside them in their fight with the storm. Even in the presence of Jesus, the source of life, they panic and **fear** death.

Just like us. We know what **fear** is like. It is debilitating and **faith** can seem to evaporate. We have our own storms that rage about us. And we draw our strength from the presence of Jesus. He knows

how we feel, our fear, our weariness. One of us and one with us. Theologians call it *the imminent Christ* - the one who shares fully in all human experiences.

We can find ourselves in situations where experience is little help. In fact, maybe experience only tells us that all is surely lost. The disciples found themselves exactly there on this day.

And it may seem like Jesus is asleep. Where is God when you need him? Where is that Saviour when our resources and abilities come to an end?

Jesus is alongside us in the boat, riding the storm with us. Sometimes we feel in control, living in the ordinary, happy just to have him with us. But then life gets a bit hectic, the waves get higher, our boat fill up with water and we start to panic. Suddenly want Jesus more involved, to feel our mess, our panic, our pain. And like the disciple we want to shake him and say " help. We need you in our storm"

## **Lesson 2 .....we need Jesus in a storm**

What happens next is a bit strange. Jesus wakes up and .....does nothing, not so much as pick up a bucket. Its all in the words - the simple authoritative word that cease the wind and waves and bring about calm. Its his words that help not his actions.

Jesus responded to their cries. He calmed the storm. His words, however, were not exactly reassuring. He didn't say, "There, there, it'll all be all right." It was more along the lines of a rebuke, asking, "Where is your faith?"

It is at this moment that Jesus is revealed as more than "one of them". He is no longer simple Jesus, the real man, sharing in our weakness and feeling our pain. Now he is Jesus fully divine, Jesus with all the power and authority of God.

It is God who created order from the chaos of the deep who strides across oceans and subdues them. Psalm 65 sings of God's grace and power. The earths' physical structure is his. The mountains may seem massively secure, the seas menacingly wild but we neither trust or fear them if we trust and fear the maker and master of both. Jesus calmness in the face of threatening chaos, sharing the lot of those who are engulfed by it, serves as a reminder of Gods rainbow promise that mighty water will not have the last word.

In theology speak the last word belongs to the **transcendent Christ**. The God- in -Christ who can act with power and transform situations. The disciples response was not to be fearful of the elements but to stand in awe of the power of Jesus.

So the question

*"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him"*

Who else but God?

## **Lesson three ..... The transcendent Christ will transform fear into faith**

We need Jesus in our boat : The Jesus who is in it with us, no matter what the storm, who controls and transforms when we let go of fear and walk in faith.

Faith that is *"being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see!"* (Hebrews11:1)

*"Where is your faith?"*

In the mercy and grace of Jesus.

Amen