

St Marc Grenoble

Sunday 20th June 2021 (Trinity 3)

2 Cor 6: 1 - 13

Mark 4: 35 - 41

'Why are you afraid?'

Good morning, welcome to everyone, those here and those joining on Zoom

PRAY

Today's short Gospel reading starts with the words: 'That day, when it was evening' so let's just remind ourselves what had been happening.

Jesus had been teaching large crowds of people all day. As we heard last week, He was teaching in parables and, because the crowd was so big, He used a boat as a pulpit, so everyone could hear Him.

Now, Jesus was tired and He wanted to spend some quiet time with His disciples – and He said they should cross to the 'other' side of the Lake to the East side, which was more remote with hardly any settlements; so they set off across the Lake, (just a few miles).

But, as the story continues, we need to understand, there is a 'sub text'. The Judean people, apart from their fishermen, weren't a 'sea going' people. In their culture the sea was often thought of as a hostile place, which traditionally had undertones of chaos, disorder, and evil; so they usually stayed well away from it.

Also, for the first readers of Mark's Gospel, there would have been immediate Biblical echoes - for example: the story of Jonah (running away from God), or the Children of Israel following Moses out of Egypt - when the sea parted for them to walk through; or even further back to the creation story in Genesis, when God's newly created world emerged out of the sea.

To give further background, the 'Sea' of Galilee is an interesting Lake – it's 680' below sea level, it's in a bowl surrounded by hills – and because of that, even today, it is renowned for sudden and violent storm squalls, which are immensely dangerous – especially to small boats.

These days there are quite a few passenger boats on the Lake, and operators need a special licence to prove they can cope with the very difficult weather conditions.

Several of Jesus' disciples were experienced fishermen, who'd worked on the Lake for most of their lives, so you'd expect them to be used to it.

Climate change has meant that over recent decades, the Sea of Galilee is shrinking - this great lake is becoming noticeably smaller. In the 1980's the remains of a boat were found in the mud at the side of the lake - and it has been carbon dated to the era around 1AD, exactly when Jesus and His disciples would have been sailing on the lake.

So, we have a very good idea of the size their boat would have been. (8.27 m long, 2.3 m wide, 1.3 metres deep, with a very shallow draft, and a flat bottom) I visited the museum, where it is on display in 2001 - here is a picture of it.

Let's get back to the story ... This must have been a very severe squall; but, Jesus, who was fast asleep in the back of the boat, slept on, apparently totally unaware of what was happening.

The disciples were terrified and, as so often happens when things go wrong, they panicked! They became angry with Jesus, because He didn't seem to be aware of the problem. They woke Him and said: 'Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown. (echoes of Jonah)

Well, of course Jesus cares! He got up (very difficult to stand up in a boat being pitched about by the sea) and ordered the wind and the waves to be quiet and, immediately, everything became still.

If the disciples were terrified before, now they were awestruck! They had never seen anything like this and simply could not comprehend Jesus' earth-shattering power! Who is this? This is God incarnate in action - our God who cares for every one of us; and the effect is totally beyond human understanding.

This is an amazing story .

Sadly there's a danger that sitting here, in the relative comfort and safety of this building, that the rawness, emotions of fear and amazement that the disciples experienced, will be cosied out; and we may not appreciate the relevance of this story to us.

But, every one of us experiences storms in our life, at some stage or another. It may not be on the sea, but the fear, or the pain, will probably be every bit as vivid and frightening. The Apostle Paul, in our 2 Corinthians reading this morning, recounts some of the 'storms' he went through in his ministry.

And, I'm very much aware that some of you, present today, have had similar, terrifying experiences in small boats on the sea; and know exactly what the disciples were going through.

Whatever your experience has been in life, there is so much for us to learn from this story. Death of loved ones, and the danger or threats of death, are a daily reality for every one of us, especially in this distorted 21C culture.

When things go wrong, and the inevitable storms of life strike, people often still say “God doesn’t care!” Well, that shows that most people still miss the point. We know that our God does care!

At least 800 years before Jesus came to earth, God says in Isaiah 41: 10 - ‘So do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’

Which is why He gave His only Son to die, and rise again for us; so we can be saved from the mess and chaos we so often find ourselves in.

Hebrews 13: 8 reminds us: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’

We need to remember that when chaos tries to take over our lives, or when we get into a mess, or a fix, Jesus truly cares for each one of us, His children, and He wants to help. At those points in our life, we should call out to Him, He will answer, He will be there for us, and He will support us.

Our society is in the mess it’s in, because we’ve drifted away from faith; we no longer teach our children Christian morals, or even a basic understanding of our Christian faith. Now we are experiencing the results.

It is so sad to see that our [young] people simply don’t know where to turn in times of crisis. As Christians we’ve allowed the teaching of our faith to be pushed out of schools, out of society; and even out of our homes. We have a lot to answer for, because we haven’t taken a strong stand for our faith.

Just like the disciples, we too often wait until we’re sinking before turning to Jesus for help. We must learn to ask Him to be with us *before* we get into difficulty; and help others to do the same.

Jesus loves us and gave His life so ‘everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have a whole and everlasting life’ – whoever they are and whatever their background ... and that includes every one of us ...

What a wonderful promise from our God, who is the same, yesterday, and today and forever ... **Amen**

Let’s Pray