

Sermon for 24th June 2018. Rev'd Jenny Simson. Grovely Parish

This morning gospel story places us on the rough waters of the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples are in the boat - the rough weather comes in, the waves beat into the boat - the boat is being swamped. The threat to their lives is real. The situation is desperate. The disciples are in panic mode. Jesus is also in the boat, but he is asleep, his head on a pillow.

When I imagine the scene and the powerful threat of the situation, I can just about feel the panic of the disciples and their confusion when they look at Jesus asleep, calm and at peace. Their response is understandable. We sometimes look outward and away from ourselves when we are in a panic and vulnerable. "Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus awakes and firstly deals with the threat. To the sea he says "Peace be still" and the wind ceases, and there is dead calm. He then brings the disciples into focus. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith".

For Jesus the reality is simple, He is in the boat with them – they are not going to perish.

So at this point in the story we may well ask the question. What **is** faith that it could have saved the disciples response to the waters of chaos?

Well the word "faith" in the New Testament is the leading biblical term for the relationship humans are to have towards God. The object of faith is God and his promises. Faith in God's promises is based on the reliability of God's own character, demonstrated in the scriptures and the believer's experiences. Faith expresses an orientation of the whole person. It is not just intellectual assent to orthodox doctrine, but confidence, trust and assurance of the graciousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the epistle thismornig we hear a perfect example of this in Paul's experience of faith. The 2nd letter to the Corinthians was written by Paul during a time of tension between himself and the Corinthian church. This was a result of Paul becoming aware of a group of Jewish Christian missionaries travelling throughout Corinth and undermining his teachings.

The faith belief of this foundational church in the Christian world was under great threat. Paul responded to the situation not with panic but with the strength of his own faith. He tells the Corinthians that through faith in Christ he has not only been able to continue on in ministry through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; but he has been able to respond to these by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God.

What Paul shows the church is an image of faith as a steadfast shining light that guides people into calmer waters. And in the Old Testament story, it was the childlike faith of David that gave him the confidence in his skills with the sling and shot, to overcome the giant Goliath.

Yet in our gospel reading here are the disciple's - men who have witnessed the certainty of God's promises in Jesus through miracles, righteousness and truth and yet they were still like children who needed reassurance. They still did not know how to derive inner serenity in the midst of trial.

How often do we find ourselves in the same position as the disciples were in the boat? We know that Jesus is in our lives -we know we have faith - yet when we find ourselves in the stormy waters of our inner places of chaos and conflicts, our faith can take a back seat.

These are the times when, I believe, it is helpful to remember that this is all part of our journey of faith. Sometimes our faith is strong and others a little weaker. In these times however, it is crucial to keep our eyes on our self and be confident that we are a faith filled person - for when we do this, we can grip hold of the truth that the calm and calming Jesus is with us.

That he **does** still the storm – and this doesn't mean that he will cure all our present ills– it means that his presence with us, is able to calm our response to those ills.

It is in this calm that our faith can grow.

The Gospel of Mark has a resounding message of the strength of faith. The core truth in the story of the stilling of the storm remains the same: *and I say this every time I preach on this reading* – Jesus Christ is always in the boat with us in the stormy seas of our lives as we journey towards the fullness of faith.

This is the promise of God in Christ through the Spirit.

Jesus abiding presence is what calms us in the midst of our sometimes stormy life.

The Lord Be With You.