

20150621 Mark 4 Jesus calms the storm STF Trinity 3 Proper

Do you walk by fear or faith? Do you sail through life or are you always bailing out the waters just trying to stay afloat? Are we at the mercy of what life throws at us or is there something we can do to make the journey smoother, less traumatic, even enjoyable? Job had a rough time of it, David had Saul chasing him across the country and Paul had all manner of trial thrown at him. How did they navigate through it all? Was the world they inhabited in their innermost thoughts governed by the physical world of chaos and misfortune or the spiritual world, the kingdom of God? Job listened to his friends and got angry and disillusioned with God; David doubted God's ways and went after another man's wife; the disciples were afraid, very afraid of who it was that could command the waves to cease; more afraid than the fear of drowning itself.

Is God asleep on the job? Many people experience a sense that God is not there for them when they need Him most. Following the Lent course a number of us have read a book entitled *God on Mute* which addressed that familiar sense they many people express that despite our protestations and appeals to God to intervene He really seems not to. There are several copies of 'God on Mute' available and I do recommend it highly.

There once was a man, are you sitting comfortably, a gardener, who tended a beautiful estate. In the middle of the garden was the most beautiful of all roses. The gardener cherished and nourished that rose every day and loved to

visit it admire it smell its sweet aroma. Then one day, the flower was gone – someone had taken it. What could possibly have possessed anyone to do this? His prized flower? Upset angry and confused the gardener went up to the big house to report the incident to the master of the house. The master listened to the gardener's complaint and then said, "It's alright, I took the flower. I needed it".

How do you respond when things you cherish are taken away from you seemingly too soon? It might have been a loved one, or perhaps your health, or a job. Can you give thanks to God for the times in your life that have been turbulent? As you look back at them, do you see God drawing you to himself and others to you? What more have you learnt of God as a result of the struggle? Experiences are indeed character building. Certainly it has become easier for me to appreciate simpler and simpler things in life as I have become aware that all of life is a gift, nothing should be taken for granted and that contentment comes from accepting that we are not in control but that God is. If the gardener had known the Master's love of roses perhaps he'd have worked out that it wasn't deviant behaviour by some rogue but the will of the master.

I grew up in a whirlwind of political change and the Thatcherite economics of privatisation trickle down and liberalisation of the banking sector. I bought into the whole entitlement culture, and speculate to accumulate, buy now pay later. Get on your bike to find your dream job and always

aspire in an upwardly mobile direction. The world I knew was summarised by the strapline 'loadsamoney'.

With the prospect of one day owning a Rolls Royce, I slogged my way through to university in Bristol and assumed the rest would be plain sailing. Little did I realise that a sudden storm was about to break tip my boat upside down and land me on very different shores.. You see university was supposed to be like Brideshead Revisited with cricket jumpers, champagne, manicured lawns within medieval quadrangles, long summers of strawberries and picnics and doing almost no studying at all. Bam! My world came crashing in on me, waves overwhelmed me, I failed my first year exams and then my resits and before I knew it the waves were high, the rain and hail were thundering away, my world seemed to fall apart. And that world I inhabited was without the knowledge of God's love.

And yet, were it not for that storm I might never have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my saviour and friend whom I encountered once I reached the shores of Leicester University where I continued my studies and was invited to join a Christian group called the Navigators. Looking back can I give thanks for that storm, very definitely yes. Did I find it easy – very definitely no but then neither did I know and trust the God of the universe as controlling and guiding and harnessing the power of nature. My life seemed chaotic, but then I had no anchor in the harbour, no rock on which to cling.

Now, when trouble comes, it still keeps me awake at night, I'd still prefer to walk by sight not faith, but I realise that the only way to live this life is to ride the waves knowing that God might appear to be asleep on the job, but actually He's probably waiting to see me exercise some spiritual maturity and have faith. Several months before this job came up in Bedminster I quite thought God's will was for me to apply to Clevedon. It barely got off the ground as the diocese wouldn't allow me to apply. Yet, I remember saying to Kate, having vented my frustration, ah well, if not Clevedon then somewhere cleverer. And how much cleverer to place me where I find myself now and loving it!

If the disciples had understood who Jesus really was, if Job had realised you can't fathom the depths of God's plans, if you and I would only learn to recognise our utter dependence on God, the direction of travel would be clearer, the passage to safety feel more certain. We won't navigate by the stars if we don't know their names, we can't find our destination without a postcode, steering through unknown waters will be terrifying if we don't know how to find North. Your trials and challenges will cause you greater anxiety, keep you awake at night for longer, prevent you from carrying out normal everyday functions if you haven't learnt to sail when the lake is calm.

My question is this – what are you doing to ensure you know how to ride the waves of God's work in the world, how are you getting to recognise the real Jesus in your life if you don't pray and study the bible. If the kingdom of God is like a

foreign land to you then you will get lost very quickly, take a wrong turning make a hasty decision and miss out on God's blessing, had you only known how to journey through the chaos with Jesus showing you the way. The kingdom of God is thrilling but also hidden uncertain mysterious. Certainty and security is an illusion a myth which fuels our spending on products like insurance and surveillance. The only certainty is death and taxes, well actually that's not quite true is it, because one day, we can also be certain we will meet Jesus face to face and every knee will bow. The question is will you recognise that it was Him journeying with you as you look back at your life?

God makes sense retrospectively – have you ever failed an exam, got turned down for a job, been refused a proposal of marriage?

What was it that meant God was able to use David, Job, Saul and the disciples? Ultimately it was their faith in the God of the sea, the land, the skies above. Faith in a God who makes himself known to us. Faith in a God who journeys with us.

Sea in Jesus day was seen as ominous, dark, demon-possessed, chaotic. What a paradox we live with that God seems to be in control of the universe and yet gives up all control to die at the hands of those he had created. On the lake in Galilee very sudden storms were common place owing to the particular geography of the region. Once waves had been chopped up, tall enough to scare fisherman half to death, they would normally take three days to settle to a calm flat lake again, to resemble a mill pond. How awesome

therefore is the power of one who can command waves to cease. How would you rebuke the wind? It's only doing its thing after all. It's not like it's being naughty.

Miracles are an intervention in the natural order of things, God stepping in to alter the usual patterns of behaviour. If God is with us who can be against us, and yet how little we turn to him to alter a situation except when things get especially choppy. I've known the presence of God much more acutely in my own life when things got choppy than when all was going well.

Job rails at God for not sorting things the way He would if He were God. Do you think God's response was angry or gently mocking? You see we have to live with the fact that we cannot bridge the gap between our understanding of the universe and God's. God finally answers Job's complaints and says to him, "When you've understood how to build a universe, let's do coffee".

I do have some sympathy with the disciples. Clearly they got it wrong but what would Jesus have them do while the boat was apparently at risk of sinking. Do you imagine they were to pray for deliverance or perhaps rebuke the wind and waves themselves? What's your natural response to events becoming complicated, out of control, chaotic, when you feel like you're drowning with such speed and ferocity – the wind gets up when you had little warning?

If you get in the habit of recalling God at work in your life in previous situations that got difficult you will find the journey much easier. Faith in the God of the universe rather than in

ourselves and our own ability is so much more sensible and reliable. But do you trust God to get you safely to the shore, to land you safe on Canaan's side? Can you think of instances in the bible where people have been called upon to trust God but then have resorted to plan B instead of waiting, or they've had advice from God and then gone away and done their own thing anyway?

Timing under God's rule is often closer to the wire than we would like. How reassuring it would be to have everything set out neatly planned on time to budget and to spec. Well God doesn't work like that and it tests our faith that he seems to sleep on the job and leave us to flounder.

Do you walk by fear or faith? If you see the handiwork of God in the lives of those around you it will spur you on to greater acts of faith. We all need encouraging, do you have a story of the power of God in the life of someone you know that we would all benefit from hearing.

Do you walk by fear or faith? Do you navigate through life by using the wisdom of the world or by the signs of the kingdom of God? The journey of faith seeks always to understand yet knows that at the same time the God in whom we place our lives is mysterious unpredictable hidden yet in Jesus revealed reliable and knows our frailty. When facing the judgement of the cross even he felt abandoned by God and yet was obedient even unto death.