

Sermon for the Second Sunday before Lent 20th February 2022

©Susan Peatfield

Well, our Gospel (Luke 8 vv 22- 25 Jesus stills the storm) could not be more appropriate today with its account of a storm, after the week's battering of first Dudley and then Eunice. And those other kind of storms. The one which about two years ago blew in from China and turned the world upside down and into pandemic. And those storm clouds which today gather over the Ukraine. The simple and the deeper storms, both of which threaten to knock us off our feet.

Week by week the people who compile the Lectionary – the set readings we hear each Sunday - put together passages that link well- that are related. This week the readings are related both at a simple and at a deeper level.

The simple level is to do not with storms as such but with the sea. And the deeper level is to do with, well, us. So let's start with the sea as all of the readings set for today mention it.

Firstly in Genesis (Genesis 2 vv 4 -24) we hear the second account of creation. This account is not of six days starting with God saying, "Let there be light." This one has no timescale and begins with water rising up to cover the earth and God creating man before he planted a garden. Creation beginning with the sea, and with humankind.

In our New Testament reading we are not on earth but in heaven. In gorgeous language we are told that there is a throne where God is worshipped and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass "like crystal." (Revelation 4 see verse 6)

Finally in our Gospel we are on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and the disciples and a storm. (Luke 8 vv 22 – 25) A primordial sea, a glassy sea and the Sea of Galilee.

To go deeper we need to get into a boat to look at what is happening in our Gospel. Jesus has spent the previous days – weeks - tirelessly healing and teaching the crowds that have followed him around the towns on the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee. He and his disciples get on a boat to go the eastern shore. Probably for some respite and rest. It is a journey of about eight miles.

For reasons connected its geography- surrounded by mountains and its great depth - the Sea of Galilee is prone to very sudden, unexpected changes in conditions. The Sea of Galilee can change from a mill-pond to frenzied turmoil in moments.

And this is clearly what happens to Jesus and his friends. They have set off in calm waters, Jesus, completely exhausted, has fallen asleep and then suddenly they are in the midst of a terrifying and life-threatening storm.

If we had never heard this very well-known incident before, but knew other things about Jesus and his ministry, we might expect a couple of things to happen next. We might expect Jesus to wake up spontaneously. To still the storm and to comfort his friends. We might expect him to say something like: "Do not be afraid for I am with you," as he does on other occasions.

If we had expected that then this passage comes as a bit of a shock. Jesus does not wake up of his own accord. The disciples, obviously as a last resort in their terror, have to wake him – shouting effectively, "Don't you care that we are about to die?"

Jesus does still the storm – we are told he rebukes the wind and the waves. He tells them off. And then instead of comforting his terrified friends, he tells them off too. "Where is your faith?" And Luke tells us that now the disciples really are afraid. Who is this friend of theirs that even the winds and the waves obey him?

Who indeed? Well, remember in our reading in Genesis when God made man? God makes a garden for him which he fills with creatures for the man's companionship, every pleasant thing and yet as the man is still lonely God makes woman to be his partner at last. We have been made by God and our cares and woes have meaning for him. Even when we think he is – at best - asleep. In fact when we look closely we see that it is Adam who is in a deep sleep while God cares for him. (Genesis 2 vv 21)

Look again at what it says about the worship of God in heaven in our reading in Revelation. Those gathered by the crystal sea cast their crowns before the throne singing to God: You are worthy to receive glory and honour and power for you created all things. (Revelation 4 vv 10 -11) We have been made to be with God forever and to take our place in enjoying him and all that he has made. This God is the one who sent his Son to us. He is in our boat with us.

But what does this mean when we look again at our Gospel passage. At this real boat in this real storm. When Jesus wakes he sees first of all not the storm but the desperate state of his friends. Jesus stills the storm and calms his terrified disciples. And he asks that difficult and surprising question. Where is your faith? Where is the real storm in our lives? Is it outside inside? We have been made the promise, shown the reality and given the hope that God is with us in Jesus. If we know him, then knowing that he is there in our boat – in our lives – makes all the difference. It is our faith that sometimes goes to sleep and not Jesus.

The stilling of the storm has a very challenging message for us. Jesus being on the boat – in our lives – does not mean there will not be storms. It does not mean that the things we fear will not happen. But it does mean that someone greater than our fear, greater than our storms within and without, is with us. The one who made us. The one who sustains us. The one who made us to enjoy life with him forever.

The message of this sea and this storm is not that we are without troubles but that we are so deeply accompanied in all that happens. Where is our faith? – well, right here in all this. Keeping us on our feet. Making us steady. Making us some use to other passengers on the journey. Making us prayerful, hopeful and strong whatever storms may come. **Amen**