

Sermon 21st June 2009 – All Age Worship

Mark 4:35-41

Some elements of nature are inherently unpredictable – and nature can be more unpredictable in some places than others.

The weather conditions where Roger was (Drake Passage and Antarctica) are some of the most extreme on the planet, and our own Cook Strait has given us frightful weather at different times over the years.

The Sea of Galilee is also known for extreme and unpredictable weather conditions. And we can assume that the weather recounted in this story was particularly frightening. Some of Jesus' disciples were fishermen and knew about sailing in various conditions.

But this storm really has them freaking out. They are well out of their depth and consider themselves at the mercy of the ferocious weather.

We have all had a taste of this sort of fear; that mild panic as we realise how vulnerable we are in the face of powerful forces.

In their fear the disciples call out to Jesus to save them:
“do you not care that we are perishing?”

And why wouldn't they call out to Jesus? ...for he is right there in the boat with them – having a wee sleep at the back of the boat.

After being woken up, Jesus commands the storm to be still, and effectively tells them to chill out.

What is this story telling us?
What is the message of this story?
How does this story connect with our experience?

Because... Jesus is not with us in the way that he was with the disciples that day, and so this occasion seems to be a very privileged one.

Jesus was on hand,
he got the message quickly from his friends,
and acted according to their direct concerns.

But this sort of scenario of direct interaction is limited to Jesus' earthly life. Jesus isn't present in the same way for us; he's not literally in our boat, or any other mode of transport where we might get into difficulty. So what can we expect from him when we are in real physical danger?

This story cannot be suggesting that Jesus always intervenes directly when we are in trouble, suspending normal meteorological patterns upon demand. Jesus is not some 'genie of the lamp' who is on call to do our bidding. The relationship we have is quite different.

We know all too well through recent tragedies that God does not inevitably act in such a direct manner as in today's story.

Many of the students of Elim College who died in the flooded river professed their faith in Jesus as Lord. In that situation Jesus seemed all too absent, perhaps even asleep. The elements of nature overwhelmed those students and death was the result.

How do we relate to Jesus who isn't physically present with us? In what way, if any, can we expect Jesus to save us from trouble?

These issues of Jesus' absence at a time of need are directly addressed in the New Testament:

John's Gospel tells of an event during Jesus' earthly life when his friends desperately sought his intervention to save someone.

There was this guy who was sick, and his two sisters knew he needed help, or he might die. They all lived at the same time as Jesus was on earth and they knew Jesus was full of the power of God. And they had faith in him.

Jesus happened to be out of town at the time and they sent a message to him, for they were desperate for Jesus to come and save their brother from his illness.

Jesus got the message that their brother was sick.

But Jesus didn't come, and their brother died.

With tremendous sadness, they had the funeral for their brother and buried him.

Four days later Jesus showed up, and the first sister went out to meet him. With tears in her eyes she walks up to Jesus, and says: *“If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

She wanted Jesus to be there to help, but he hadn't been, and her brother had died. Jesus had not intervened as she had hoped.

Shortly after, the other sister also came up to Jesus and said the same thing to him: *“If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

How does Jesus respond?

He makes the most stunning statement about himself. Jesus says: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”*

Right there, he reveals the truth about who he is and what it really is about him that saves people from death.

Jesus is talking about something that hasn't even happened yet.
Something that makes the world of difference for all people –
equally then and now.

A reality that transcends our own experience.

A promise to save us from every horror and protect us from
anything that might try to destroy us.

Jesus' own resurrection.

It is the resurrection of Jesus which is the only basis for hope that death will not completely swallow us up.

Jesus raised the women's brother back to life that day he arrived, but that man did not live forever, later on that man died again.

The real hope that Jesus proclaimed was not in the restored heartbeat and brain function of the brother, but in the new life, the resurrection life, that he brings for the whole world!

So how can we expect Jesus to save us from trouble?

In the most significant sense we can imagine, Jesus has already saved us from every trouble.

God has intervened; this is the whole story of the Gospel (the Good News).

Death is no longer the final reality.

This is the faith we are to have.

This is the faith that Jesus teaches his disciples to have.

The experiences we have in our lifetime will shake our faith, that God is loving and powerful. At times the worst of human experiences will suggest God does not save us.

But there is a purpose in God about which we actually know very little detail;

we are invited to trust in the character of this God who promises us his never-ending love and asks us to lean our whole weight on him.

This story of Jesus calming the storm gives hope to those who first read it (and to us today) only because of the saving reality of his resurrection.

It is on the third day that the storm is calmed, the tomb is empty.

Evil is still a reality, but it is no longer the final reality. It has been cut off at the source, and while it may make gasping attempts to drag us down, it has been defeated.

This means, whatever the storm around us, we actually have nothing to freak out about, or ultimately get us down. Whatever we experience; whatever we feel, we are saved in the most significant sense.

Jesus has saved us from fear itself.

An expression of our Christian faith is that trouble will never have the final say.

Jesus has the final say: "I am the resurrection and the life."