

Luke 8:22-25 - Peace in the storms of life

Many years ago we chartered a sailing yacht from a boatyard on the south coast of Cornwall. We had a wonderful week sailing in the company of one of my brothers, his wife and family. Whenever I think of that holiday two things stand out in my mind, one extremely pleasant and the other not quite so good.. The first of these was a lovely tea garden where you could moor up and have a wonderful cream tea. That place seemed to draw me like a magnet. Wherever we sailed I always had that place in mind. It was like a magnet that drew us back time and time again (well at least twice) Unfortunately, one day we decided to sail much further away. The sailing was once again excellent, but no cream tea. At the end of the day we decided to return to our original sailing area. I was a bit reluctant because I could see some rather dark clouds on the horizon and would have preferred to moor up for the night. But my brother, who is a very experienced yachtsman, said it would be OK. Off we set in our 2 yachts. Half way across the open stretch of water the sky got darker and darker, the waves began to increase in size, and, of course it got worse and worse. One minute we were having a gentle sail and the next we were battling against the elements, with the sky getting darker and darker. No sign of my brother's boat in the reduced visibility. We were well and truly on our own, when all of a sudden we realised that another boat had appeared and was keeping pace with us only a few yards away and it accompanied us for some time. In some ways it was reassuring, but to this day we have wondered about that boat. Was it the coast guard? Were they trying to ensure that we were OK or did they think we were smuggling contraband or drug running?

Perhaps all they were doing was making sure that we did not run into any kind of danger, because there were various rocks and other hazards that had to be avoided. After what seemed a long time they peeled off and went there own way, but now we were in sight of the harbour that we were making for and safety was just around the corner. What a relief it was to emerge from the ferocity of the storm into the tranquility of that welcoming harbour, a really safe haven for the night and one that we thoroughly appreciated, even though it didn't have any cream teas. When we met up with my brother, the experienced yachtsman, we found that he had got into all sorts of difficulties and his first words were "Wasn't that terrible." But we had all come through safely and it was certainly nowhere nearly as bad as that storm in our Gospel reading.

Storms at sea and even on lakes, as we heard, can be terrifying. According to some background information that I found, the Sea of Galilee is the only fresh water lake in the land of Israel and is therefore ideal for fishing. As you no doubt know it is in the northern part of that land. It measures about seven miles across at its widest point, is about 160 feet deep and its surface is in the region of 600 feet below sea level. When you look at a map you see a valley running up all the way from the much lower Dead Sea to the south. Hot air from the desert region can quite quickly come all the way up the valley until it collides with the cooler air to the north coming down from Mount Hermon. The result - sudden storms on the lake.

It was one such storm that caught up with the disciples as they were crossing the lake. Their boat would not have been very large and would have felt very unsafe with the wind blowing and the waves getting higher and higher. It is easy to understand their fear as the boat was being swamped and they could see only too well the great danger that they were in. In Mark 4 verse 38 we are told that "Jesus *was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.*" He would have been on a small seat in the rear of the boat, where a carpet and cushion were placed.

The helmsman would also be at the stern but a little further forward in order to have a good view ahead.

What I find interesting about this episode is that the disciples first thoughts were not to turn to the helmsman for instructions as to what to do for their safety. Although some of them were experienced fishermen and would have known the ways of the lake from so much past experience, they turned to Jesus. Why did they do this? Because they knew in their heart of hearts that he was the only one in that boat who could save them. They had heard his teachings and witnessed his miracles. Here was someone whom they knew had the power to do something about the terrible danger that they were in. It was this that probably led to Jesus asking them in Mark 4 verse 40 "*Why are you afraid?*" and adding the admonishment "*Have you no faith.*" With Jesus amongst them they had no cause for fear. Very easy for us to say on dry land but very difficult for those in the midst of a storm. Something that we ourselves need to learn - with Jesus in our lives we ultimately have nothing to fear. He will take us through those battering times of trouble if only we stay close to him.

Even though the boat was being swamped by the waves Jesus took his time in dealing with the disciples' fear, because he had something very important to teach them. As we heard in verse 24 "*He rebuked the wind and the raging waves; and they ceased, and there was a calm.*" Not only was Jesus calming the storm he was calming their fears as well and building up their faith in him. The result was immediate - verse 25 "*They marveled, saying to one another Who then is this, he commands even wind and water and they obey him?*" This was something that they would remember for the rest of their lives - fear replaced by confidence in Jesus. The more we know the presence of Jesus in our lives the less our prayers will be driven by the desperation of fear and the more they will be driven by a quiet and powerful confidence in him.

In the same way that Jesus brought peace to his disciples in the midst of a terrible storm he brings peace to us on our own voyage through life. So let us think about some of the storms that we endure. Not necessarily storms at sea or on a lake, but storms that we get caught up in on our journey through life.

First of all Jesus gives us peace in the storms of anxiety. Our peace is so often shattered by the storms of worry that try to envelope us as we journey through life. Particularly in today's climate we have the worries over money, the worries over redundancy, the worries over our health, the worries over climate change, the worries over terrorism, the worries over the crisis relating to the Ukraine, and the worries about others and about ourselves.

Secondly Jesus gives us peace in the storms of life's problems. We all have those times of tension and uncertainty. There are times when we do not know which path we should be taking and which way we need to go. It is at times like these that we need to pray asking Jesus, as the disciples did, to Save Us - to save us from those terrible storm clouds through which we have to pass. We need to ask for his presence in our lives as we seek his will for us and submit to his guidance. The answers may not come immediately, we may have to wait, but they will come and we will know his peace in the midst of the uproar that is all about us. The storms of life's problems will be quelled, very often in ways that we ourselves could never have foreseen.

Thirdly and finally Jesus gives us peace in the times of sorrow. We all go through those times of sorrow, sorrow for those close to us who are in the midst of life threatening illnesses and sorrow for ourselves at times of bereavement. What to us seems to be the darkness of the storm clouds of this life can be turned by Jesus into the sunshine of eternal life in the presence of God.

The storms of life may swirl around us, but we must always put our trust in Jesus, praying and looking to him to take us through those dark clouds, knowing that he is just as close to us as he was to his disciples in that small boat in the midst of the storm. AMEN.