

**SERMON – 1/8/21****“Jesus Cares”**

Matthew 8:23-27

Those with Jesus in the boat say: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him.” (Matthew 8:27)

During these Sundays before and after Family Week we are looking at the Bible passages that will form the focus of each day's lesson at the holiday club. Already we have heard Jesus say to His first followers: 'Come with me' and we have thought a little about the call of Jesus on our own lives; we have looked at the story of the wise and foolish builders and we have thought about how Jesus will continue to guide us if we are listening for His voice and willing to heed what He says. This morning we have read another passage that will be familiar to many, the account of Jesus calming a storm and I would like to think with you today about how comprehensively Jesus cares for us as he leads us through life. Jesus calls, Jesus guides, Jesus cares.

In today's reading, Jesus is escaping for a bit of a break – there is no doubt that He is in need of it since He falls asleep in the boat and continues to sleep even when the storm brews up and the waves sweep over the boat. The suddenness of the storm perhaps makes us wonder what was going on – *we* are used to a gradual deterioration of the weather, but this storm seems to have burst out of nowhere. The fishermen disciples could surely not have expected it, or else they would have advised Jesus that it wasn't safe to travel across the lake. A friend of mine used to work in Tiberias on the shores of Lake Galilee and I remember him speaking about the awful storms that suddenly blow up on the sea – apparently they are caused by cold air rushing down the steep mountain-sides around parts of the lake and stirring up the water sometimes in quite a localised way. Localised though the storm may have been, it nonetheless put the little boat in great danger and we shouldn't try to minimise the sheer terror that the disciples felt. But if they were fearful of the wind and waves, how much more fearful were they of the power of Jesus to still the storm by a simple word of command. What I would like to focus on this morning is what *we* can learn about Christian discipleship in turbulent times and about the way that the Lord Jesus cares for us in body, mind and spirit.

Out there in the middle of the lake as Jesus stills the storm, the disciples have a question: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him.” For many people, a sense of awe and amazement marks the beginning of their quest for faith. We are *thinking* creatures; we ask questions as we seek to grow in understanding. And especially here in the face of something that was beyond their ken, the disciples’ minds are stretched as they try to make sense of the revelation of God they are being given in Jesus Christ.

Many, many people believe in God – perhaps, most, actually when it comes right down to it. But the God many people believe in is the God who is revealed in the world around us – there is a seemingly innate understanding in human beings that “the hand that made us is divine;” that the world didn’t happen by accident but that a Creator has been at work in fashioning the mountains and seas, the insects and the flowers. But most people are happy to stop there in their understanding – they are happy to marvel at the beauty of what their eyes can see and their ears can hear and their noses can smell, and perhaps to give thanks to the Creator or at least to express a sense of awe – but they are not interested in exercising their minds beyond that. Perhaps that was where the disciples were at in their understanding of God, so when they saw what Jesus did in commanding the wind and waves, their understanding had to be completely reviewed. In Jesus, someone they knew as a man like them who worked and ate and slept like they did, they were seeing the power of God at work and it forced them to rethink.

The challenge of Christianity to the mind is this – that God is *more* than a mighty Creator, distantly enthroned in majesty, but that He has revealed Himself to us as a human being, and that the one who “flung stars into space” as the hymn puts it, has walked this earth, makes Himself known to us in a personal way and in fact was willing to surrender to cruel nails for us. It’s little wonder that the disciples were amazed that day in the boat. “What kind of man is this?” they ask. We too can have our minds touched by that amazement as we recognise God in Jesus Christ. Perhaps you have marvelled at the glory of a sunset or the perfection of a flower or the wonder of a newborn, but have you come face to face with the One who is behind it all? Have you made the connexion between God the Creator and the Child of the manger who came among us, the Teacher of Galilee whose words we revel in, the Crucified and Risen One whose life has been unleashed in our

midst? What kind of man is this? He is the Son of the living God, my friends. How amazing!

But Christianity does more than make an impact on our intellect – if it does only that, then it becomes a mere philosophy, a dry academic exercise. But as it touches and changes our minds, it awakens our *spiritual* longings, and that is something we also see here in this story. It was in the midst of the storm in the middle of the lake as they stared in the face the prospect of death by drowning that the disciples learned to call upon Jesus as their Saviour. Their spirit was awakened, and as they poured out their hearts to Him – “Save us, Lord, we’re about to die!” and they found that in calling upon Jesus for help, all the power of the living God was unleashed. And that is true for all who find in Jesus Christ that God is not distant from us but close to us, His ears attentive to our cries – the letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus “is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede.” He is seated at the right hand of the Father, mediating to Him the cries of our inmost being.

Understanding with our mind that God is a personal Being revealed to us and approachable by us in Jesus Christ unlocks the possibility of a deep, spiritual relationship of dependency upon Him that satisfies the very deepest parts of us and brings us life in all its fullness. In the face of great danger, the disciples opened themselves up to Jesus completely and entered into a new dimension of life – and that can be ours too. Perhaps you have been in a situation of great danger at some point in your life; perhaps you have even stared death in the face; perhaps you know what it is like to cry out to God for your very life. But it doesn’t need to be *in extremis* that we come to the Saviour – He calls us to come to Him right now in the midst of the ordinary, for one day we will all face death and how much better is it to be prepared for that moment in advance. What kind of man is this? He is the Saviour – put yourself in His hands *today* and don't delay.

But, finally, and here’s where we come to the most basic and ordinary aspect of our humanity – not our intellect that most of us engage only occasionally when we have time to ponder; not our spirit that we too often suppress and neglect; but the everyday physical (almost animal) part of us that takes up so much of our time and energy. The disciples in the boat that day were taken up with a battle for survival, a battle against the elements to save their very lives – that’s the nitty gritty of life (albeit in a very extreme

form) and if Christian faith has nothing to offer us in such situations of trouble or danger, then it doesn't address the whole of our being. But it *does*! The disciples were in great physical danger and the Lord to whom they cried saw them through it – their lives were spared.

God doesn't promise that we'll be spared trouble and danger in life as we answer Jesus' call to 'Come with me' but He *does* promise that He will be with us through it all. "How little faith you have" He says to them, "Why are you so frightened?" Where is *our* faith? Do we actually put our trust in the Lord in the midst of our life's everyday struggles? That's the great test of faith – not so much what we profess to believe as we gather here, but what we have faith enough to claim at the point when our very life is threatened. "What kind of man is this?" He is the Lord of life and the Conqueror of death.

Jesus cares for you, the whole of your being, the whole of life. "Come with me," He says. "Listen to me," He says. "Trust me," He says. The same Jesus who called the disciples to cross with Him to the other side of the lake calls *us* to journey with Him today. The Jesus who made these promises is the same Jesus who ordered the winds and the waves to stop and there was a great calm. So do you trust Him? What kind of man is this? The man who is God.