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Introduction

The disciples find themselves in a boat crossing the water and Jesus falls asleep – his head on a cushion. The disciples panic – fearful of the increasing winds and waves that threaten to engulf their boat. Yet despite the teaching from Jesus that we saw in our reading last week – the disciples seem not to realise that Jesus invites us to move towards him, to allow Jesus to work in a situation that is challenging. There is a choice to make when you find yourself in chaos – to move towards Jesus, or to travel alone as the turmoil builds around you.

Text

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Comment

Imagine for a moment that you are in a precarious situation. Maybe, like in the gospel reading, you are in a boat and the waves are crashing over you, the wind is deafening in your ears, you can't stand up for fear of being swept overboard. Drowning seems very close.

Or you are lost on a hill. The cold, wet mist is swirling around you. You are scared and lonely. Or maybe you have spent the day in glorious sunshine on the beach, walking along the bottom of the cliffs – before you know it the swirling sea has swept up the beach and cut you off from any escape route. You are scared, lonely and facing the prospect of having to climb the cliff to avoid the waves that are now crashing at your feet. Or maybe you are having a very heated debate with a neighbour, it is not a healthy debate, and threatens to turn violent. You are scared.

Imagine yourself in a situation such as these.

Now picture yourself at the scene you have created. And also picture your closest friend asleep nearby, curled up on a cushion – looking so peaceful and unaffected by the unfolding situation.

What do you do? What do you feel?

How could Jesus stay asleep while the storm raged? How could he leave his disciples to face this alone – while he took a rest?

One thing that is certain in life – we don't need to find chaos and challenging situations, they usually find us, and they are unpredictable in their appearance.

In our gospel reading last week you were invited to consider finding a space to hear the voice of God, to move towards your inner being in the presence of Christ when challenging situations come. To spend some time in Christ's presence before moving towards the storm.

The story of Jesus stilling the storm comes straight after the parable of the Mustard Seed that we considered last week in the gospel of Mark, and yet when the storm comes on the water, the disciples appear to have forgotten all that Jesus taught them through this parable – at least if they did remember they were not able to put it into practice.

They panicked, they asked Jesus about his values, 'Do you not care that we are perishing?' What they didn't do was seek his sanctuary as the storm gathered pace. They don't even seem to realise the power he has to control the wind and the waves.

So what were the storms of life that were present for Jesus and his disciples? Perhaps the most obvious is the political scene – the unpopular Roman Empire being the ruling body of the time. Jesus himself became a political prisoner and was crucified, before the glory of God was seen in all its fullness as Jesus rose from the dead.

This story is more than an example of the power and authority of Jesus. The story of the disciples in the boat is about fear in the midst of terror. It is about how we cope when life throws chaos into the path we are travelling. It is about how, when we are at our most vulnerable – we choose either to go it alone, or we choose to intentionally turn towards Jesus and seek his power, his authority, his peace. To move towards the one that has promised to always be with us. To seek his solace.

Have you noticed that Jesus asks his disciples if they still have no faith? And that the story of the Mustard Seed, as told in Mark's gospel, does not mention faith as the other Gospels do – and yet here Jesus is questioning the faith of his disciples, and more to the point, he questions why they were afraid. The implication is that if the disciples had faith, they wouldn't need to have panicked or to be afraid when the wind and waves became overpowering. They would have moved towards Jesus, towards the place of solace despite the danger.

When you feel the waves of life crashing over you, when you feel you have no control over your environment, over a situation you are in, when you are in the midst of confusion or fear – you are invited to move towards Jesus, to ask him to take control of your response and being, to still the noise in your own head so to hear the voice of God. To move to a place of solace and stillness despite the raging storm.

We are not always asked to stay in these dangerous, precarious or fearful situations. The story is not about putting up with anything that is thrown our way – for Jesus stilled the winds and the waves – but whilst they are raging, we have a God who wants to travel with us, to bring us inner peace and a place to rest. An inner sanctuary. In the words of Jesus – ‘Peace. Be Still’.

Response

– Do you ask Jesus to take control when life is messy? Do you seek his solace?

– What process of discernment do you use to ensure you are listening to Jesus in the face of difficulties?

– How do you enable others to draw close to Jesus when challenging situations arise?

Spend some time this week alone with Jesus, seeking his guidance in an area that you find challenging or difficult.

Prayer

Loving Jesus
who is with us in the calm
who is with us in the challenging

We pray for your love, so to be able to lean much closer to you
when the waves of life are in danger of swamping us

We pray for your peace, so to be able to call your name
when the winds of life are becoming a storm

We pray for the gift of being able to join you on the cushion
for a moment of quiet reflection
a moment to gather our thoughts and spend time with you

We pray that we may face the storms of life with you
and not alone
That we may travel on with your guidance, your companionship, your peace
Until we reach the other side.

Amen.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: Inner Journey