



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula

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## Sermon

### Trust God through the Storms

Job 38:1-11; Ps 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Cor 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

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Our Church logo is a yacht with a full sail. Sailing involves wild weather as well as idyllic evenings. We are not to be merely fair weather sailors. So we will find ourselves from time to time, sailing in rough weather.

When the trials of life arise, we wonder whether we are being punished, maybe we protest that we shouldn't be punished because we have done nothing wrong. We may complain that it is unfair. Perhaps we soldier on resolutely.

The reading from Job comes near the end of the book. Job was a righteous man but he has suffered the loss of his children and his wealth. His friends insist that these troubles have come because he has sinned. He maintains that he has not sinned and protests to God about it. Finally, God replies to him that Job should argue advance his case. But first of all, is God merely a man? Has he no higher understanding? He challenges Job to consider whether he understood things as God did? For God established the earth and marked out the limits of the sea. God's thoughts, knowledge and power are far greater than ours.

#### Psalm 107

The Psalm set for today, also addresses our vulnerability as opposed to God's power:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever. <sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD say this--those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, <sup>3</sup> those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. ... <sup>23</sup>Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. <sup>24</sup> They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. <sup>25</sup> For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. <sup>26</sup> They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. <sup>27</sup> They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. <sup>29</sup> He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. <sup>30</sup> They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. <sup>31</sup> Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. <sup>32</sup> Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.

Andrew has been a part of the 10am congregation for a year. I recently heard of an experience he had at sea which ties in closely with these readings.

#### Andrew's story

Andrew was in a solo yacht race in the Southern Ocean. The race was overtaken by a mighty storm. For three days, Andrew battled against the elements with no sleep or food. Other boats were sending out Mayday calls but there was nothing anyone could do to help them. He had long since drifted from the faith of his upbringing, but he knew he was in grave danger and he shouted into the storm for help. If God helped him, he would respond.

Soon afterwards, he noticed a large dark object in the water to windward. After fearing it was a shipping container, he eventually realized it was a whale. For two days the whale stayed on the surface upwind of him. When the wind changed,

the whale changed sides. It protected him until the wind died down. Its shelter allowed him to get food and some relief. It protected him from the fury of the storm. A marine biologist subsequently viewed video footage Andrew had taken and identified it as a Right Whale. He said it was exhibiting typical protective behavior normally given to a calf or a needy member of a pod.

In time, Andrew came to realise that this was more than a marvel of nature but it was God's provision for him.

Like the sailors in the Psalm Andrew cried out the Lord in his trouble and the Lord brought him out of his distress. Now he has exalted the Lord before the assembly of his people – that's you!

It was early days in Andrew's walk with God. It was an outworking of Paul's words, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."<sup>1</sup> And in the long run, he did not receive God's grace in vain, but has come to put his trust in Jesus.

## **Stilling the Storm**

The Gospel reading also involves boats. Jesus had been teaching, speaking from a boat to the large crowd gathered by the lakeside. As the day ended, Jesus said, "Let us go over." It was the disciples who had the means – the boat. So they took him. It may be like that for us: he directs us but we have the bodies, the cars, the houses. He is always with us but we have to go, to act.

The disciples took him in the boat and he settled down to sleep with a cushion in the stern. Soon however a violent squall came, for which the Sea of Galilee is notorious. Cool air from the Mediterranean is drawn down through the narrow mountain passes and clashes with the hot, humid air lying over the lake resulting in sudden violent storms. Mark wrote, "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped."

The disciples (of whom at least four of them are fisherman) were obviously frightened – it was no ordinary storm.

But Jesus was asleep! How would you feel? - How can he sleep through a storm? They woke him up. "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" "The water is filling the boat – we're going to sink..."

When you think about it that is a stunningly stupid question to ask the Saviour of Mankind, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" Of course he cares. But he is not worried. He is living in a place of peace. They are living in anxiety. They don't understand yet who he is.

What did they expect? Did they want him to bail? From their response, I am sure they did not expect what happened. He rose, rebuked the wind and said to the sea "Be silent. Be muzzled." (It's like talking to a dog, isn't it?) And the wind died down and there was a great calm. Then Jesus turned to them and said, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

## **Who is this?**

Mark is clear that the disciples found it very hard to grasp who Jesus was and certainly had no concept at this stage. They were terrified and wondered who this man could be that even the wind and the sea obey him. Who is this man? *The Bible* would tell them who this must be. Take today's reading from Job where God said,

"Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?'"

Answer? God not man. It is God who set the seas and clouds in place and commands them. Surely this and other texts told them the one who can command the wind and the seas is none other than the Almighty. In fact, I think they knew that, but it was too terrible to contemplate. If that were true, what were they to think?

It would take a while longer, more miracles, more teaching, more claims for the truth to be absorbed and accepted. Finally, it took the resurrection for most of them to grasp it and proclaim it.

## **Why the rebuke?**

But let's backtrack a bit. When Jesus stills the storm, he turns to them and tells them off for their lack of faith. What did he expect of them? Hadn't they done all that they could?

Let's translate it into our setting. We are in a difficult situation. We cannot solve it ourselves, so we pray God to do something. He responds and sorts out the situation. What do we think? Great, my faith was well placed. Good faith!

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 6:2 quoting Isaiah 49:8

But they are in a difficult situation which they cannot solve, they ask Jesus (they pray to God) to do something. He does and sorts out the situation and (get this) says, "Have you still no faith?" It appears he expects them to have done something else...

Jesus was modelling Kingdom life and activity for us. Yes he was and is divine, but the key to understanding his ministry on earth is that he had laid aside his personal divine attributes and acted in obedience to the Father in the power of the Spirit. When Luke described the start of Jesus' public ministry he said, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit..." Jesus was acting in the power of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who is given to us.

Jesus has delegated to us his authority. We are expected to use that authority and use it wisely. We won't always get it right. We won't always see full blown success, but if we don't use it – we never will.

Remember, when Jesus had stilled the storm, he turned to them and asked if they still had not faith. What did he expect of them? Was he expecting them to do it themselves? - that would have been using their faith.

What about you? Are you tugging at God's robe asking him to sort out a problem or are you starting to get the vision that sometimes he may expect you to take seriously the tools and authority he has given you?

If Jesus says, we are going to the other side – you will get to the other side. It is the Lord of Creation speaking. I wonder if Jesus has called you to do something and you have protested it can't be done? If so, what does this story say to your situation? What might Jesus expect of you which you haven't done yet? What resource has he given you which you haven't used?

Last year, we made the moves into the new Op Shop and to employ Tony. I said that these were a result of God's favour poured upon us. Paul quotes Isaiah 49 and says "I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation." Will you, will we, act in the confidence of His favour. Will we embrace the opportunities God puts before us – both individually and as a congregation?

### **Mission challenge**

In 2013, Helen and I were strongly and clearly called by the Lord with Anne Aspden to go over to Kondoa on that Short Term Mission. We were invited back again and wait for guidance. That came and we went the second time. The second occasion allowed us to go further and deeper with the teaching the Bishop asked us to give. We were invited again. Again we sought the Lord's will and simultaneously in a seminar early this year we heard the Holy Spirit speaking through the speaker saying, "Go to Africa!" I submitted it to Vestry each time and they have given their support for these trips as part of our Parish's giving and outreach ministry.

So we are to be in Kondoa for two weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> September, God willing. My question is who will come with us? It is good if a team goes. It allows others to make connection with our brothers and sisters in Tanzania; others to have the joy and the growth of their faith through the mission experience. I have asked four of our people to come. Two have family commitments which prevent it; two are still praying about it.

What about you? Will you pray about it? If you are drawn to the idea let me know so we can talk over what is involved. We need to finalise the team soon so we can make bookings and other arrangements. Remember, if Jesus says, "Let's go over," he is going to get you there --- just like the disciples.