



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Authority

Mark 4:35-41; Job 38:1-11

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The waters of the Sea of Galilee can get ferociously rough, the wind is funnelled between the hills either side of the sea and can whip up strong seas. At the carparks on the Western shore there are warning signs that waves can swamp cars parked on what looks like the safety of the lakeshore.

The disciples recorded this account from an eventful day with Jesus. Some of them (Peter, Andrew James and John) were experienced fishermen. Yet, they were terrified by the overwhelming wind and waves. Jesus had said, "Let us go over to the other side," and gone to sleep. He didn't seem worry but they sure did! The boat was about to sink. When they woke him, he spoke to the wind and the waves and commanded them to be quiet and still – and they were!!! He was in control of nature.

Some people struggle with the idea of a nature miracle. One commentator even went so far as to claim that Jesus had merely said that it was a great storm but it would die down again. But anyone could say that. Experienced fishermen would not be impressed let alone bother to record it as significant. We must not water down the Bible, explaining it away, thinking we are more knowledgeable. If we have that attitude we will learn nothing and we will be in the category of people Jesus warned have ears and do not hear, eyes and do not see. Rather, we must repent – remember that means change our minds - and believe.

This Gospel passage has some marks of authentic testimony - comments that are not necessary but the sort of thing someone remembering the event says merely because they remember it.

In verse 36, there is the comment, "they took Jesus just as he was in the boat." And the observation that there were other boats too. In verse 38, that Jesus was resting on a cushion. These are eye-witness details and they give extra confidence that we are reading an account from someone who was there.

Context is important. As a minor example of that, in the past I have pondered about that comment that they took Jesus just as he was in the boat. What was Mark thinking about? Was it his clothing? What was the significance? And I had found no answer until this week, I found out from the Passion Translation. It is not earth-shaking but it helps to illustrate the importance of context.

We are told at the start of chapter 4 that Jesus got into a boat in order to address the crowd by the lakeside. He told the parable of the sower and several others. It was "just as he was," because he was already in the boat to speak to the people. Then the disciples joined him on board to set off for the other side. I know it is trivial, but it shows that this is a connected whole and that we shouldn't read the Bible with blinkers on caused by reading portions rather than the whole.

What is the more significant context? I think there are two.

The Old Testament tells us in multiple places that God has dominion over the seas. Take the example of our Old Testament reading from Job:

⁸ "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, ⁹ when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰ when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, ¹¹ when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"

Psalm 89:9, "You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them."

A well-versed Hebrew mind would understand this storm-stilling, wave-quietening action of Jesus to be an example of divine power.

The other context is that the gospel is giving evidence of the authority of Jesus in teaching, over sickness, over nature, over the demonic. That is what the collection of stories from this part of the Galilean ministry show.

Let's dig into the story a bit deeper. Jesus was asleep while the storm raged. How would you feel? ... How can he sleep through a storm? They wake him up. "Teacher, don't you care ..."

How often do we think that of God? Don't you care? Of course he cares. But he is not worried. He is living in a place of peace. They are living in anxiety.

Jesus woke, stood up and rebuked the wind and the waves saying "Be silent. Be muzzled." Or as the Aramaic puts it, "Peace. Submit to the will of God!" And the wind died down and there was a great calm.

Then Jesus turned to them and says, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Why the rebuke?

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 which we cannot solve ourselves - so we pray about it. He responds and sorts it out. What do we think? Great, my faith was well placed. Yet the disciples did exactly that and Jesus said, "Have you still no faith?" It appears he expects them to have done something more...

I have said before that 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 ..." That is the same Spirit who is given to us.

Carlisle Flood

Let me tell you another story. In Cumbria in January 2005, there was a big storm on a Friday night with a month's rainfall overnight. It caused both the rivers which join at Carlisle to flood and burst their banks. About 1000 houses were flooded, some of them with 6 feet of water. About 50,000 people were without power in the wider area. We spent Saturday visiting flooded houses taking hot soup to people.

On Sunday the weather forecast said that another weather system was coming in off the Atlantic and was expected to drop more rain into the catchment area. At that stage the rivers were still in full flood and the thought of more rain was appalling. In our service, the reading was the 'Ask, Seek, Knock' passage, where Jesus encourages us to pray and keep praying. With the dramas of the weekend and being at the emergency shelter until the wee hours I had no sermon ready but I found that examples of commanding the weather kept coming to mind as I spoke.

I told of the time when Helen & I were staying in a cottage in the Kauaeranga valley. After sustained, heavy rain over several days, the owner came and warned us that the river was rising and we might have to evacuate. So, we used the authority delegated to us as Christians and prayed commanding in Jesus' name the rain to stop and the river not to burst its banks. The rain did stop, the river did not burst its banks, the local people were not flooded out. Coincidence?

I told of the time when our church in London, had a camp away and it was pouring with rain all weekend. On the Sunday morning, the leader of the children's programme came to the Vicar and said, "I cannot contain the children much longer." They need to get outside but it is too wet. He called the church to pray; had us face out and command the rain to stop. No sooner had they finished, the rain stopped, the clouds parted and the sun came out. Just then a breeze sprang up and as they watched the trees were shaken and all the drops of water fell off. A few moments, later they heard the happy cries of children playing outside.

Having told them these stories, my Carlisle vicar said to me, you better lead us in praying. So I explained to the people, that we would be commanding that weather system not to cause further destruction. I had some face up one river valley, and some up the other valley and command the rain not to fall in those areas. I had some face west and command the weather system to divert and drop its rain over the sea and so on. They were not used to this idea at all but bravely responded. I stressed that we were not asking God, we were not commanding God, we were acting as God's agents in the world using his delegated authority, commanding nature in the name of Jesus.

In the 2pm weather forecast that day, the vicar heard the forecaster say that they were surprised that the weather system which had been expected seemed to have veered off course and headed north. No further rain fell that day. Coincidence?

The next day, my vicar was invited to the emergency meeting of the City Council. To my surprise, he told them what we had done and the outcome – I guess he was convinced. When soon afterwards, the Bishop visited, he congratulated me on the lead I had given.

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.

So where are we with all this? We can be encouraged at several levels:

1. Let us not be afraid. Choose to put your trust in Jesus. Let him know that you rely on him to rescue you from whatever you fear. See what he does. What might he do for you?

Do you remember what he said to the disciples? "Why are you so afraid? Haven't you learned to trust yet?" He expected them to trust that if he said they were going to the other side they would get there. When God says something is going to happen – it will happen. We can trust what he says. If God makes a promise you can trust it.

2. If you are in need, take heart from Paul's words in the Epistle as he quoted from Isaiah, "'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.'¹

Can we put our trust in God that today is the time of his favour and that he is ready to rescue us?

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¹ 2 Corinthians 6:2 quoting Isaiah 49:8