

St Brandon's, Sermon for Sunday, 20th June 2021.

Job 38:1-11, Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32, Mark 4:35-41

Still centre

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Every time it comes to my week to write the sermon, I feel a frisson of nervousness. I have become a past master at leaving it to the last minute: ruminating in the lead up and simultaneously trying to forget it's looming. I map out the time I'm going to write in then allow myself to get distracted, playing cat and mouse with myself as to how much time I've really got. But when an unexpected event intrudes on my planning, that's another matter – and thus it was this time: and so it was that I started writing this with the queasiness of panic, the adrenaline of anxiety still fresh in my limbs.

Its not for nothing that the sea is the symbol of chaos and disorder, it perfectly captures the sense of overwhelming scale, the waves threatening to close over you, nothing to see but waves and liable to only get bigger.

Where do we turn? What will get us past this moment? What will take us or enable us to reach the other side and firm ground again?

I guess for the disciples, hastily attending to oars and sail, bailing out the water that crashed into the boat as each wave hit, falling over each other in the dark yet trying to balance the boat, the sight of Jesus asleep on his cushion must have been puzzling and frustrating.

I wonder what answer they would have got if, instead of waking him with an accusation, they had woken him with a question, 'How can you sleep through all this?'

But the waves are terrifying, their frustration that he *is* sleeping through it all banishes any possibility of quiet reflection: reflection is not going to save their skins.

But what is Jesus likely to be able to do? What can anyone do?

They don't question his peacefulness, they challenge and disturb it, as if it is an affront to them, when being active: '*doing*', even vain *doing*, seems the only possible response.

But Jesus is just '*being*'.

Resting in a knowledge and place of ultimate safety that is out of reach of the disciples.

I wonder what you think his answer might have been if they had asked, 'How can you sleep through all this?'

I wonder if he would have made reference to his Father in heaven?

I wonder if the disciples, good Jews that they were, would have called scripture to mind in their distress? Familiar lines and images – perhaps the picture painted in the Psalm we heard, of the ship rescued by God who '*brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.*' Faithful, saving God.

Where is that faithful saving God for them, now?

And where was the faithful, saving God for Job? Faithful Job who tried to hold faith even when his whole extensive household and ten children had been extinguished? Job, who could bring to mind nothing he had done to cause retribution and wants God to tell him what he's done so Job can explain himself and defend his conduct. "Tell me. *Do* something."

And God *does* nothing – except show up and talk to him.

God turns the questions back onto Job to challenge Job to see and admit, and *submit*, to the scale and magnitude, the all-encompassing authority that is God, in which the universe has its being.

Perhaps this is a story familiar to the disciples? God answering Job out of the whirlwind ... *“who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? ... prescribed bounds for it, ... and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?”* God determining the limits of the sea, containing and ordering the chaos.

And yet, the disciples fail to make the connection when Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, and the wind ceases and there is a dead calm. Jesus’ frustrated response to them: have you still no faith? They are in awe but fail to see the correspondence between Jesus’ control of the sea and God’s control of the sea that they know through scripture, they fail to connect and believe that he is the fullness of God.

But it was all part of the things that had to happen, the teaching and events that would form the undeniable evidence of Jesus as God contained in human form – the story that had to happen.

When Jesus was asleep in the boat, was he so tired-out that he was oblivious? Or was he *so* safe in the knowledge that he was One with his Father, that he could trust and wait for the storm to pass?

‘Let be, and let God’? A great phrase.

When we are overwhelmed with fear, in blind panic, do we call on God to “Help: *DO* something?” Are we demanding a fix of our problem? Or are we content for him to calm our fear, still the storm in us, and restore our right minds?

When we are enabled to see clearly, and think calmly, we can cope with pretty much anything. Those of great faith who have been incredibly tested are a testimony to the capacity of faith to carry people through extraordinary hardship by the capacity to

hold God's peace and stillness, and know themselves held by him no matter what.

We don't know what lies ahead of us, what our story will look like when its finished, and we don't really have much – any - control over the big events that overtake us. But, as God is describing to Job, as Jesus is showing to his disciples: *we* don't have any control, but *they* do. And if we can know how we are held and loved by them, if we can trust ourselves to let be and let God, we can be pulled back from being overwhelmed by our own lack of control, that makes us so afraid.

Sue described in her recent sermon how prayer is like relentlessly digging a ditch for the water to run through. This is the day in and day out work that builds the quiet centre in us that is the place of God's peace, stillness, and calming. We talk about 'centering' and 'grounding' ourselves, all ways of describing the fruit of this prayer-work that goes on for a lifetime and we only start to recognise in ourselves in the faintest way initially.

'Being' is as much a verb – an activity, as 'doing', but the activity is inward and upward; God's peace that builds that calm centre requires us to be active inwardly with the eyes of our heart on him, so we become opened to his grace from above, lifted a little above the sorrows, energised for what we have to do in the world.

When, at last, the disciples recognised who Jesus was, he came and stood among them, and it was all-sufficient for him to say "Peace be with you".

Lord, come among us and still our storms, bless us with your peace, now and always.

Amen