

# "Journey with Jesus: White Water Boating"

Sunday 9 August 2009  
Rev Brian Senior

## Readings

Psalm 93

Matthew 8:18-27

## Sermon

What's your first reaction when you hear the account of Jesus Calming the Storm?

- Memories from Sunday School days?
- One of those stories which seems a bit far-fetched?
- A good story for children?

The question this passage raises is whether or not we really believe in an all-powerful God who has authority over all things, including the the forces of nature ... and that Jesus was given that authority too?

The reason this question is important is that what we believe, or don't believe, about this, will have a huge impact on the nature of our Christian faith ... especially about God's authority over our own lives ... and how we live in response to that faith.

Do we or don't we believe that God is all-powerful? ... and do we or don't we believe that he can help us whatever tough things are going on in our lives?

It is sadly true that in many places the historical truth of the Bible is questioned. Even in some Churches the mighty acts of God and particularly the miracles of Jesus are written off as allegories ... symbolic stories with a meaning ... as though we worshipped a God who was not all-powerful, and had no authority to intervene in our lives.

Now it is true that there are many different kinds of writing in the Bible ... history, poetry, wisdom and prophecy, and we need to understand what we are reading in order to know how to understand it. The Bible is always true, but not all of it was written as literal truth.

Jesus himself told stories, after all – parables, which were to make a point and teach his disciples – so it would be fruitless, for instance, to go looking for the Inn where the Good Samaritan took the man who had been robbed ... or the barns where the Rich Fool stored his grain. Parables are meant to be understood as stories, and considered for their meaning, not taken literally.

But there are many incidents which the Gospel writers record *about Jesus*, which are accounts of real events which happened to real people in real places ... and this is one.

We ought not to doubt the truth of God's word simply because our imagination is too limited to grasp how he works in his world. If we imagined that we could understand everything, then we would be putting ourselves in the place of God.

The account of the Calming of the Storm is a real, historic event, which shows Jesus in both his humanity and his divinity ... that he was truly man and truly God.

Jesus had been busy ... something of an understatement! He had been travelling around the region of Galilee, teaching and healing, casting out demons and preaching about the Kingdom of God. He needed time away from the crowds, and told the disciples to get a boat so they could cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

So they got into the boat ... and rocked by the gentle movement of the water, Jesus was soon asleep.

Well, I guess most of us can relate to that. Jesus was tired, and sleep came easily. For once he could leave the others in charge. After all, several of his disciples were fishermen.

Peter and the others knew all about boats, and they knew the Sea of Galilee very well indeed. That's where they had earned their living before they left it all behind to follow him.

Most of the time, the Sea of Galilee is calm and tranquil ... but lying as it does between the Golan Heights on the East and the Mountains of Galilee on the West, it is subject to sudden and violent storms. They come without warning, fast and furious, and whip the water into a frenzy ... frightening storms, so that even experienced sailors like Peter and Andrew, James and John, can be caught off-guard.

I imagine most of us can relate to that, as well ... storms coming, which catch us off-guard?

... though not, perhaps in the literal sense.

We all face times in our life when something unexpected comes along and rocks us. It may be a serious illness in the family, the threat of redundancy, or a relationship breakdown which we never saw coming.

Even those who are closest to us can take us by surprise, sometimes ... and there are plenty of external forces which effect us, outside of our control. I suppose the most obvious 'storm' at the present time is the financial crisis, which has left people who thought their jobs were secure suddenly out of work .. or people who thought they were set up for life, suddenly facing the possibility of losing their homes.

The future, of course, might face us all of us with more real-life storms than we had ever imagined. If the experts on climate change prove to be right in their predictions, we can expect extreme weather conditions to become more and more frequent, and we will all need to adjust to a changing climate.

So ... let's get into the story. Matthew tells us that:

*"without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat."*

What did the disciples do when they suddenly found themselves in great danger?

They cried out to Jesus: *"Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"*

Remember, these were mostly hardy fishermen, not given to exaggeration, except, perhaps, about the size of their catch! They knew the Sea of Galilee, and they knew about storms. If *they* were afraid, then this must have been a really exceptional storm.

So they woke Jesus up. I wonder what they thought he was going to do?

Of course Jesus *did* do something ... and what he did astonished them!

There are three things to notice about Jesus' response:

- First thing ... he was surprised / disappointed at their lack of faith

"*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*" Jesus asked them.

Obviously they weren't entirely without faith ... they woke Jesus up, presumably because they believed he could help them. It's not clear what they were expecting, since they were amazed at what Jesus did ... but they obviously thought he could rescue them somehow.

What they weren't ready to do was to trust that they would be safe with Jesus *without* waking him up. They had yet to believe that if Jesus had got them into a situation, that he would take care of them.

Here again I imagine most of us can relate to how they felt. Even if we have been journeying with Jesus much longer than these disciples had been, how often do we find ourselves in new situations ... facing new circumstances ... and lose our nerve?

I was talking with someone about this just the other day ... how despite God having proved his faithfulness to us so many times in the past, we still get anxious and afraid when faced with a new difficulty. Why is it that we are so slow to learn to trust him?

But even if Jesus was disappointed with their lack of faith, he did not leave them to fret.

- Second thing ... he rebuked the thing which frightened them

Even the hardened sailors among them were frightened by the storm. No doubt some of them had lost friends or neighbours in storms like this one. They were afraid they were going to die.

This is the point where we are reminded of who Jesus really was ... that although he was fully man, he was also fully God ... with power and authority even over the forces of nature. Matthew says: "*He rebuked the wind and the waves.*"

In other words, Jesus gave them a good telling-off.

Jesus understood that the disciples were frightened, and he took their fears seriously. The storm was a real threat to their safety ... even to their lives.

What about your fears and concerns?

- On the tables is a mauve sheet of paper with a picture of a boat in a storm.
- Within the storm are various suggestions of areas in our lives about which we can be troubled or afraid.

[*friends, work, neighbours, fear, relationships, family, worry, environment, age, health, school, parents, children, money, home*]

Maybe you can identify on here some of the storms that come upon you from time to time ... sometimes we can get battered over and over again by the same sort of thing, but all of us go through troubled times ... storms are, as it were, a normal part of life.

Are we ready, I wonder, to call out to Jesus for help? ... and do we believe that he cares, and that he has power to make a difference?

.. because that is the thing which amazed the disciples

– Third thing ... he had power and authority, even over the wind and the waves.

Jesus spoke, Matthew tells us: *"and it was completely calm."*

Imagine how those men must have felt, standing together in a boat with someone who tells the wind and the waves what to do!

Have you ever come across one of those Christians who seems to be serene and peaceful in spite of the fact that everything around them appears to be falling apart?

People who are like that have learned this truth, like the disciples in the boat:

*"even the winds and the waves obey him."*

If Jesus can speak to a raging storm and command it to quieten down, then there are no circumstances in our lives which he cannot overcome. There is no problem too big, and no problem too small, which we cannot bring to Jesus.

- This doesn't mean that when we come to Jesus all our troubles are over.
- This doesn't mean that whatever problems we face, God will just take them away.

Sometimes we may experience God changing our circumstances very quickly and dramatically ... and the storm is immediately stilled. Sometimes we have to live through storms, and we grow stronger by passing through and coming out of the other side, and our faith is deepened. Sometimes it is in the middle of the storm that we really discover what it means to trust in Jesus.

The point is that Jesus is always there in the boat with us. He doesn't abandon us to the storm or leave us to cope on our own. Even when the storm is raging, he can still give us his peace.

So how should we react when troubles come our way?

What is the proper response of the Christian disciple when faced with danger or difficulty?

- 1 Crying out to Jesus is fine!
  - 2 Trusting Jesus is something that grows ... it comes with practice and experience.
  - 3 When we know that Jesus has 'saved us', both in the fullest sense of salvation from sin, and in the sense of helping us in times of trouble, it should lead us to a deeper devotion ... a more complete love ... and an outpouring of praise and worship.
- Think now of the times when Jesus has been there for you in difficult times, or rescued you from trouble ... and give him thanks.
  - Think now of any storms which may be approaching you at the moment ... write them on a piece of paper ... then screw them up and throw them into the boat, and

together we will ask for Jesus help.