

## Reflection for Pentecost 4 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

Travelling is something of a distant memory for most of us because of the pandemic. But imagine yourself, for a moment, in the Holy Land and on the western shore of the Lake of Galilee at, let's say, Nof Ginosar Kibbutz Hotel. Its early evening during late winter or early spring. You are sitting outside enjoying a drink. All is still and quiet then a noticeable breeze suddenly blows up off the lake before, a little later, dying away just as quickly. You think nothing of it, just commenting to the person sitting next to you that it is getting a little cooler.

Then you read today's gospel reading from Mark about Jesus calming the storm - a story which provides an accurate description of an easterly storm on the Lake of Galilee. Modern day fishermen will recall how on occasions that wind from the east is not just a breeze but a storm that whips up the lake and causes even them more than a degree of apprehension.

These easterly breezes and associated storms are a result of the lake being 700ft below sea level and the adjacent mountainous range, to the east, reaching heights of 2000ft. Differing temperatures, cold in the mountains and semi tropical around the lake, as these two air masses interact late in the day, the result is either a stiff breeze or a storm, that can occur without warning.

It is against this backdrop, just such a storm, that Jesus is pictured in each of the synoptic gospels quietly sleeping in the back of the boat as the storm blows up.

What this story does is encourage us to make comparisons and ask questions.

The first comparison is between the fear of the disciples as this storm blows up against the calm of Jesus asleep: and we need to remember that at least four of the disciples were seasoned fishermen on the lake. They knew its waters and weather patterns and even they were terrified the boat was about to sink.

Panic set against calm; fear against peace - in the face a storm that saw the boat potentially about to be swamped.

Scholars looking at this story have compared the church to that boat: a boat navigating the treacherous waters, knocked about by times of persecution and trial; may be one of the reasons for including the story in the gospels. The writers have in their minds groups of Christians suffering as a result of trial and encourage reflection on how we would react. Are you calm, trusting in God like Jesus or are you panicking like the disciples, ready to give up?

It comes down to how we look at a situation. Do we allow what we see around us to dictate both our response and actions, do we allow it to fill us with despair? Or do we place our hand in God's hand trusting in his grace and moving forward with hope.

This first comparison is reminding us that following Christ will not be trouble free. As one writer has put it *"It is not that tribulation may come, nor even that it will come, but that it must come"* The question is how we view it, with hope or despair. Is our trust in ourselves or God?

The second comparison is between the disciples' total inability to respond to the situation. As hard as they struggled to keep the water out of the boat, it still kept filling up. Compare this with the quiet authoritative actions and words of Jesus. *"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!"* Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He speaks and there is calm.

We all find ourselves in similar situations from time to time. Can I cope? Yes, I am all right, when in fact we are sinking under for the second, maybe the third time. We all like to think we have the strength within

ourselves to overcome whatever it is we face yet, so often, that is not the case.

A number of years ago I went on a management course during which we did an exercise that began with us working on our own, then proceeded to place us in groups, and it showed that working together, the group could achieve more than any one individual. Yet so often we like things to be our way, in our own strength.

One of the things the Christian faith highlights is that we so often go our own way and make a real mess of it. When we do - we need God! We need to look to him for salvation, strength, and support - and not just in those emergencies.

In the same way as the disciples were helpless, so are we. We need to cry out as they did *"Master, Master! We are about to die!"* Because it is only as we hand over to God that he can and will help.

The final comparison is between Jesus' reaction to the situation and that of the disciples. Jesus *"Where is your faith?"* The disciples *"Who is this man? He gives orders to the winds and waves, and they obey him!"* One, the cry of a loving God, wanting the disciples to come closer to him. The other the questioning of those just beginning to understand the reality of who Christ is.

Reflect on the prologue to John's gospel and you see very clearly that Jesus was there at the creation; it was through him that all things were created. And here, in his actions of calming the storm, that power is manifest in a way that leaves the disciples in awe and adoration. Jesus speaks, just as God speaks in creation, and all is calm. The disciples are driven to ask: who is this that even the chaos of the storm obeys him? Mark, in his Gospel, gives no response, simply leaving the question for his reader to reflect upon.

Look back over these comparisons and three things become clear.

- Trouble and persecution will come to those who follow Christ; and when it does, we should not view it negatively, but through the eye of faith.
- The only way to get through such times and situations is by trusting in God, placing our hand in his.
- Christ is the one who created the world and has power over it. It is him that we worship, it is him that we praise and, like the disciples, we should marvel at his works.