

27/6/20, Mark 4: 35-41 Peace in the Storm

v. 39: Jesus stood up & commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" & He said to the waves, Be still!" The wind died down & it was completely calm.

The disciples had followed Jesus for some months and had witnessed all the miracles He performed. They had also witnessed the crowds following Him and they had started to trust Him. Yet like many of us, they remained slow to learn. In this story, they were to be challenged to entrust their lives to Jesus' hands in a violent storm that blew up.

Crises and difficult circumstances often push us to our limits and test the depth of our faith. That is true to a greater or lesser extent for all of us at this time. The disciples faced a furious storm and felt helpless. Many of them were fishermen and storms on the Sea of Galilee were normal. But in this particular storm, their experience, their strength and skills to confront the storm seemed useless. They were hopeless. In fear and desperation, they finally turned to Jesus for help. Jesus told the wind to die down and there was calm. Why was it that the disciples were still slow to learn? It seems that they had never fully understood who Jesus really was and they had only turned to Jesus as their last resort during the storm!

Life's storms can be very challenging but God is bigger than all the storms we face. God is always there for us and He promises not to leave us, even in the places where we cannot see Him and in circumstances that we do not fully understand. Hear the words of comfort from the Lord speaking to us, as He tells the storm, "Quiet! Be still!" He is with us, right in the midst of the storm that we sail through. He will surely guide us, protect us and carry us until we reach the shore safely.

Jesus asleep in the boat is a symbol of serenity & calm. Not that He doesn't care. Not so much that He calms the storm but that He is there to calm His disciples. That's part of the miracle for me – that Christ was with them in the boat - and He is in my little boat with me today, with me in the midst of storms and dark nights & He can give me peace. And you too! May we learn to trust Him!

*Lord, grant us faith in the storms of life, save us from the surging water and help us to see You, always with us, as a present help in trouble.*

## Praying in difficult times Acts 4:23-37

Picking up from where I left off 2 Sundays ago, back to the account of the early church in Acts 4. When Peter and John were released from prison, the threat of re-arrest was still hanging over them – like too many Christians in Iran, Pakistan or China today. So how did they respond? They returned to their church family and prayed together about this danger. Although the dynamic duo, Peter and John were the clear leaders of the Apostles, Peter and John did not think that this threat only concerned them, so they did not try to deal with it alone: they humbly recognised this was a shared problem about which every member of Christ's Church should pray: *enable your servants to speak God's message boldly and to reach out with Christ's healing power.*

How they prayed then in that crisis, is a lesson to us today how to deal with trouble. Threats and trouble like serious illness and all of the upheavals and anxieties of Covid-19 with restrictions of our local church activity and worship may tempt us to question whether God really is sovereign, still in charge. Could God really be all powerful, if the Jewish authorities were able to threaten and seemingly thwart His plans?

Similarly, most of us have asked at times in the past, and especially now at this time, "Why? Why has God let this happen?" when things seem to be going wrong in our lives. And the anxieties, struggles, challenge and heavy burdens faced by many as we start to tentatively emerge from lockdown restrictions.

Those first Christians had faced the threat head on. They reminded themselves that despite appearances, God was and is very much in control. They reminded themselves of Psalm 2's promises and of Christ's sufferings in order to encourage one another that although over the centuries, people have always resisted God, the Almighty is never taken by surprise. His good purposes for us remain firm. They also praised and thanked the Lord for His help so far – do we? Or do we often forget to thank God?

When these first Christians in Jerusalem prayed, only a few months after Jesus had been crucified and had then risen from the dead, they did not ask God to remove their problems and stop the authorities from persecuting them. But what they did pray for, instead, was to ask God to give them the courage to continue doing His will despite all the threats and troubles they faced.

Do we ever pray like this? How much of our prayer life is taken up with asking for God's will to be done and how much with asking for an easier life? This last part of Acts chapter 4 describes how God did respond powerfully to their prayers for strength, and also in their sharing and caring for each other. Should we not try praying as they did? MP 133 Father, I place into your hands