

Second Sunday before Lent Year C of Luke

Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-25

Psalm 65

Revelation 4

Luke 8:22-25

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves.

Humanity has a flirtatious and dangerous affair with nature. There has never been any shortage of men or women keen to embark upon such an affair. Teams are queuing up to climb Everest, vying to do it by the most difficult route, with the least support, in the least time. Only a few weeks ago an intrepid Arctic crosser was lifted off an iceberg as it got smaller and smaller. We lesser mortals content ourselves with Ilkley Moor.

On one level we are clearly enthralled by nature, whether mountains, hot or cold deserts, or oceans. And many people get quite a kick from the danger associated with nature. There is a thrill to be gained from the uncontrollable power of wind or rain or wild beasts. Many of us actually enjoy the knowledge that if all goes wrong, we could be lost, injured or even killed.

Storm is the dominating fact of today's gospel story. Luke makes it quite clear that Jesus was going to escape the crowds. And this was a marked characteristic of Jesus's ministry. He spent much of his time with people but that needed to be balanced with time out, time somewhere quiet to be alone and to be with his father. And Jesus often found that time in the natural world, on a hillside or up a mountain.

And so it is ironical that the same natural world that was supposed to provide a refuge for him becomes a challenge as the storm whips up and threatens to sink the boat.

And very often the storms of nature are used to represent the inner storms going on inside our hearts. In Shakespeare's King Lear for example, the central character is an old man who decides to abdicate his throne in favour of his daughters. And he is then surprised that his daughters push him around, deprive him of his perks, and strip him of his dignity. He no longer even has a home: two of his daughters arrange that he will live with each of them in turn, a kind of gypsy of no fixed abode.

And Lear breaks under the strain. And as storms break outside he leaves his daughter's house and head for the heath, stripping off his clothes as he does so. The storm around him mirrors perfectly his inner despair and confusion.

Benjamin Britten uses a very similar idea in his opera a Peter Grimes. Here the story is of a fisherman on the very edge of society. He takes no part in the affairs of the village and so when his apprentice is killed at sea the tongues start wagging. And when a second apprentice dies the knives are well and truly out. Grimes is completely ostracised. And it is significant that this story of one man's alienation from society is set against a background of one storm after another.

And in that context we need to hear Jesus's words:

Why are you so frightened?

How is it that you have so little faith?

These are no longer simply words spoken to men on a boat two thousand years ago. These are now words spoken to me, here in Bradford in 2019. As my world seems to be falling apart, I need desperately to hear these other words of Jesus:

Quiet now. Be calm.

Why are you so frightened?

So, why am I so frightened? Well, there may be all sorts of reasons. I may be facing difficult changes in my working life, even redundancy. I may be facing deterioration in my health or even death. My marriage may be breaking up. The person closest to me may have died.

And these are very real causes of stress. But why am I so **frightened**? Perhaps the ultimate cause of my fear is the belief that I have to face these on my own, that God will abandon me, that he simply will not be there.

And that is a fundamental spiritual issue. Either God walks with us through every difficulty - or he does not. And if he does not, then perhaps we would be better going to Morrison's on Sunday morning. But if he does, then fear should be completely banished from our lives.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the belief that God walks with us. And that belief lies at the heart of the two other readings we heard this morning. They are taken one from the Book Genesis and one from the Book

Revelation. In a sense these are the two bookends of the bible shelf. They are the very first and the very last books of the bible. The story of creation from Genesis makes the point that God made men and women. Now sometimes you hear this story presented as if it were an alternative to the theory of evolution. It is not. Taking the Bible seriously does not involve putting aside all our scientific knowledge. The story of creation is not a scientific claim at all. It is a spiritual one. It is a claim that human life is not random but planned by and loved by God. We are of value to him. You are of value to him because you have your origin in him. You are made alive by his spirit.

In a sense the Book of Revelation makes the same point. Only here it expressed not in terms that we have our origin in God but that we have our end in God. Genesis tells us that we come from God; Revelation tells us that we go to him. We have a purpose. And we can trust God.

But trust in God does not come automatically. It is not simply switched on when are baptised or confirmed. It needs developing. We need to make time to be with God. That is why it is so important to be here today and every Sunday. That is why time every day with God matters - and the busier and stressed my life the more important it is to make that time.

But there is one more thing to say about trusting God. And that is about giving thanks. It is here in the opening of Psalm 65:

You are to be praised O God in Zion;
To you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem

It is important quite literally to count our blessings. At the end of each day to give thanks for the people we have met, for the kindness that has been shown to us; for the kindness that we have been allowed to show to others. Because the more we give thanks to God for all that he has given us, the more we will grow in confidence that he will give to us in the future.

The more we give thanks, the more confident we will be of his constant care for us.

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N Clews
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