

Mark 4:35-41

PSALM: Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32

EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

GOSPEL: Mark 4:35-41

Not too many people in our modern world are terrified of Jesus. If people think about him it's either he is a kind of celestial teller machine - put the right code in (prayers) and out comes what you want - or, more commonly, they think of him as someone who has no relevance to their lives. The polls tell us that people still, however, find Jesus intriguing. But terrified of him? Really?

The gospel for today tells us it had been a long day for both Jesus and his disciples.

Crowds were growing. Growing to such an extent that it was more effective for Jesus to sit in a small sail boat on the Sea of Galilee and speak to the crowd gathered on the shore. In the previous chapters to Mark chapter 4, where our gospel reading is taken from today, he'd been doing a lot. Not only that, it had become quite complicated. Our gospel writer, Mark, tells us that Jesus taught in parables. But this meant that rather than let the light in to the content of his teaching, the opposite seemed to be happening. Like the promise of God in Isaiah chapter 6, people listened, but they didn't understand. He spoke clearly, but their minds remained darkened. Even the disciples needed a personal explanation.

In chapter 4, just before our passage we find these words: *"With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything."*

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That's hard work!

It's tiring work!

And it's no surprise that Jesus urges his disciples that all of them should go to the other side of the lake, a short journey, and others go with them.

A life-threatening squall comes up. They start to ship water. These are mostly experienced sailors - and experienced on this body of water. Yet all of them fear they will drown.

We read: Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

"Don't you care?"

Was it all to come to nothing?

His extraordinary call to the fishermen to now fish for people.

The new names he had given some of them.

The authority he had given them to preach, to cast out demons.

The surprising status he had given them as his new family.

The fact that he had given them the secret their nation had longed for over hundreds of years - how and when the real kingdom of God was to arrive.

Was this all to be lost?

And Jesus is sleeping. Seems like he has not a care in the world!

Resentment, fear, frustration, anger build quickly.

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But, rather than quieten their anxiety, what happens next tips them over the edge.

Verse 39: He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!"

Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

All it took was two words: "Quiet!" "Still!" and creation immediately snaps to attention.

Now, I could try that - but it would be stupid. You and I have no more control over the elements than King Canute.

Remember him? About 1000AD in Britain his courtiers were sucking up to him. "You could do anything you wanted, even stop the tide in its tracks".

Canute was having nothing of such stupidity. He ordered his servants to set his throne up midway between high and low water mark. As the tide came in he waved his sceptre and rebuked the incoming waves. They of course, as he knew they would, took no notice.

What arrogant stupidity to think a human being could control the forces of nature.

But Jesus did.

And it seemed so effortless.

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He spoke two words and the angry sea fell still and silent. Immediately. No long incantations. No superhuman straining, muscles bulging and eyes popping like a super hero. No! Two simple words of the most incredible power and authority.

Remind you of anyone?

It certainly reminded the disciples.

Verse 41:

“They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!””

Not relief. Not gratitude. Not doubt.

Terror. Naked fear.

It’s the right question, though, isn’t it?

“Who is this?”

Earlier we heard some words recorded in the oldest book in the Old Testament, the book of Job. The LORD is speaking in his own courtroom. In summary he says: *“Where were you, when I spoke a word and the world and everything in it came to be?”*

We heard some words from Psalm 107:

When God’s people were nomads - he had mercy on them and led them to a land of plenty.

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When they were in prison under penal servitude for life he burst their chains and set them free and showered them with peace and stability.

Even when they rebelled against his good laws and went their own way and justly suffered conquest and exile, he did not abandon them. He rescued them and brought them home.

And when they were in life-threatening danger at sea, and they were at their wits' end, certain they would perish, He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.

That's God.

The God the disciples had known about from their mothers' knee. They knew only God directs the elements to move and they obey. Only God directs the elements to obey and so rescues his beloved people.

Rescues them from certain death.

That's why the disciples are terrified.

"Who is this?"

Can this be God?

The God who spoke worlds into existence?

The God who controls those worlds by his own almighty speech?

The God who controls those worlds by his own powerful word for the good of his people?

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This is what terrified the disciples - more than the risk of death by drowning in a storm.

Being in the presence, there in that very boat, of the one who controls, rules all things by his powerful word.

We know what conclusion they came to, or were forced to. They could do nothing less than acknowledge, as Peter was to do in four chapters time:

“You are the Christ, the King, the Son of the Living God”.

My friends:

This Jesus is God, our Almighty Creator, the Sustainer and Ruler of all things visible and invisible, past, present and future.

Whose power is infinite.

Whose word is almighty.

Who is terrifying once you really understand who he is - except for one important fact.

We can know him as our rescuer.

He not only rescued his disciples from death that memorable day on the Sea of Galilee.

But he rescued them and you and me from death as a consequence of sin.

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This is the Jesus we confess. The almighty, all-powerful King over kings, Lord over lords who strikes terror into the hearts of all.

But who uses his power for the good of his people.
He is our mighty Saviour and Lord.

Will you take him this day as your own Almighty Saviour and Lord?