

All At Sea!

Job 38¹⁻¹¹; Psalm 107²³⁻³²; 2 Corinthians 6¹⁻¹³; Mark 4³⁵⁻⁴¹

*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?
[Mark 4⁴¹]*

Given that this time next week we should have been preparing to board a small ship and then to cruise around the Western Isles in the waters of the north Atlantic Ocean before the experiencing the calm of passing through the Caledonian Canal, I am not sure that I welcomed the fact that three out of four readings this morning talk about storms at sea- and that only two of them talk about the calm that God brings to the tempest (alas, C-19 put a stop to those plans – God's sense of humour again)!

I confess that being near the sea is good for my soul: there is something about the way it cannot be contained; its vastness; the restlessness of it; the calm; the power; the noise; the danger – all of these things together remind me of so much that is true of God and, at the same time, reminds me of how small and insignificant I am (against the sea and certainly against God).

That is what the exchange at the end of the Book of Job is focusing on – that God demands of Job a response to his majesty as he has experienced it in his trials and as he knows it in the splendour of creation. Eventually, Job responds as answers, **I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me.** [Job 42³]

Even Paul's list of his miseries (**endurance, affliction, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger**) pales into insignificance against this limitless power!

What is exciting, to me at least, is to note that the end of Mark 4 and the beginning of Mark 5 is a deliberate sequence that shows who Jesus is (go home and read it – homework from this morning):

- ✘ We have read the stilling of the storm, showing that Jesus is Lord over nature;
- ✘ Next comes the exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac, showing that Jesus is Lord over the Devil;
- ✘ Then the woman with the haemorrhages that wouldn't respond to treatment touches Jesus' hem and is healed, showing that Jesus is Lord over illness;
- ✘ Then Jesus raises Jairus's dead daughter to live, showing that Jesus is Lord over death.

This is one of the most important sequences in Mark, placed before Jesus is rejected at Nazareth and it establishes him as the Messiah immediately before he sends his Apostles out to expand his mission. Those with Jesus say, **Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**

My Grandfather was a fisherman, working on the North Sea, for most of his life. His take on the stilling of the storm was interesting. He knew that the Sea of Galilee, lying between hills, would have had a storm most evening as the air cooled as the sun set. He said that the fishermen would have known this and it would have been something they knew how to deal with. For them to think they were at risk, the storm must have been extraordinary. The fact that Jesus is annoyed with them and says, **why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?** When he says, **Peace, Be still,** nature does what humans find so difficult – it does what it is told by the one it recognises as Lord!

In every situation – in nature; against evil; in sickness; and over death – we can know that Jesus expects us to have faith and to be unafraid and we can know that this same Jesus will command peace. Those with Jesus will still have been wet from the water because we are helped through situations not prevented from experiencing them.

In Sunday School we sang '*With Christ in the vessel we can mile at the storm, smile at the storm, smile at the storm, as we go sailing home!*' Still true – and it is never a good idea to jump that ship (and the booking will never be cancelled)!