

MARK 6:45-56  
JESUS IN THE STORMS

It is Sport Relief weekend; people have been doing all kinds of sporting challenges to raise money; some have cycled from John O'Groats to Land's End. Dougie Vipond and Fred Macaulay set out to canoe the length of the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness. It was planned for three days in February and to take these three days to canoe the whole length of the Caledonian Canal, through Loch Lochy, Loch Oich and Loch Ness, camping along the way. They got to Ft William and it was -16°C and the canal was frozen solid. So they walked to Loch Lochy and then rowed; again they walked alongside Loch Oich which was also frozen and on the second day they canoed half-way up Loch Ness, on a beautiful sunny day, with the loch like a mirror and though they were sore at end and cold, it had been easy going; this was Scotland at its best, a wonderful scene. They spent the night by Loch Ness and then on the last morning woke up to a grey sky and a head wind of c.25knots, just on the verge of possibility. They set out and of course it was much harder work and they had to dig into all of their reserves of energy, which because of a lack of sleep were reduced anyway. Towards the end of the trip, some others came out to meet them in their canoes and rowed alongside them to the end of the canal and that was a real fillip to them; it encouraged them to keep going to the end; they were also kept going by the reason for doing the trip in the first place, to raise money for people in need across the UK and across the world, and that was especially important at times when they were cold and tired and wanted to give up and go home to a nice warm, comfortable bed.

This is not a million miles away from the experience of the disciples, one night on the Lake, the Sea of Galilee. It was the end of the day when Jesus had fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish and now Jesus sent them away in their boat to go back across the lake. He then sent the crowds away as well and wanted some time on His own to pray. It was hard going; perhaps not one of the sudden storms of the lake, but more of a continuous headwind that meant the disciples doing hours of steady back-breaking rowing and not getting very far for so much effort. Jesus has been praying and sees them toiling so He decides to walk out to them on the lake. He seems to want to walk past; they think they've seen a ghost and cry out and Jesus speaks to them, gets into boat and the wind dies down and they get to the shore safely. It was another extraordinary act of Jesus for His needy disciples.

Why did Mark tell this story? It is always a good question to ask. Why did he include it in his gospel? What was he trying to tell us about Jesus? Very simply, he is trying to paint a picture of Jesus, so that people will believe in Him. That's what the gospels are all about. They paint a picture of Jesus so that the people who read these stories will come to faith in Jesus. If you want to find a Bible book to give someone to read who has read nothing of the Bible before, start with Mark's gospel; it is pacy, full of action and shows us Jesus in some quite remarkable ways. Reading about Jesus like this creates faith and strengthens faith. 'This is what Jesus is like; this is what Jesus can do; believe Him, trust Him, follow Him!'

**1. Jesus is the Lord of the wind and the waves:** it is so easy to have a picture of Jesus that is far too small. We have notion of Jesus as our Friend, as someone who loves and cares for us and He is that, but He is much more than that. "*About the... then He...*" (6:48b, 51) Don't try this at home, or on the Water of Leith, or worse on the Harlaw reservoir because you won't be able to do it, even if the water is frozen over! Jesus as Lord and we see that in 2 ways: 1)He is able to walk on the top of the water; some suggest that, in fact, the boat was closer to the shore than the disciples realised and Jesus was simply wading in the shallows and they just thought He was

walking on the water, but some of them knew this water like the back of their hand, they knew they were in middle of the lake and that Jesus was doing something extraordinary. 2)the wind calmed down when He got into boat and the real impression is that this is something Jesus did! So He is full of power, the Lord of wind and waves, One who can command the elements like this, One whose power and authority are huge. Indeed, other New Testament passages take this further and describe Jesus as Lord of all creation, Lord of heaven and earth, one who stands at centre of everything created, made by Him and for Him. This is how big Jesus is; He is cosmic! Our friend is the Lord of the wind and the waves, the centre of all creation. Wow! This is so important for all sorts of questions that are flying around: what is life all about? What is the future of our planet? How do we understand the world we live in? How do we understand ourselves? Jesus is the Lord of everything that exists, He stands at the centre of what life is about, what the world is about; we can't really understand these big questions without Jesus Christ.

**2. Jesus prays “After leaving...” (v.46)** At the beginning of this series of sermons on Mark, we pointed out that Jesus prayed then too. This is the only record of Him praying since then and till Easter. But we said then, that prayer was Jesus regular habit, every day, finding time and space to pray. If walking on water shows something of greatness and Godness of Jesus, then praying shows something of his humanness; prayer shows something of a sense of need that He might have, needing grace from God for Himself or for others. I came across a quote the other day from Wm Still, who describes this as “the action of a homesick son who in the evening turns to the phone to ring his parents and recall a little of the atmosphere of home... “What sort of day have you had Son?” And so, the unique intimacy of Father and Son was preserved and faith strengthened, not only for another day, but for a stormy night.” (Geo Philip *Daily Grace* p75) So Jesus prays to keep His relationship with His Father alive and is the model for us in that, but there's another part to this. “*He saw...*” (v48) Imagine Jesus at prayer and looking up, He sees the disciples straining and struggling; what will He do? He will pray for them. He will ask His father to help them, to keep them safe, to give them strength and courage; He will pray for them to have the resources of energy to keep going, and resilience to survive back-breaking energy-sapping rowing against the wind.

**3. Jesus comes to the disciples “About the...” (v48ff)** It is between 3 and 6am; it is dark and they're tired; they think they're hallucinating to begin with and it makes matters worse; they think they see a ghost and they cry out. Jesus spoke to them, clearly and kindly: “*Take courage...*” (v50) and the second of these three remarks is the key: He is with them and everything will be all right; He is with them and so they need not be afraid; He is with them and so they may find courage to deal with their difficult situation. There is a real contrast here: between the rich power and grace of Jesus with the poverty of the disciples' faith: their hearts are hard, their faith so small; they hadn't understood or appreciated what had happened earlier that day with the feeding of the 5000, they weren't ready to learn, they hadn't grasped what this was all about; the miracle appears to have made no impression on them at all in terms of building their faith. So they are terrified, till Jesus comes to them in this extraordinary way, they cry out for help and He brings them peace.

So Mark shows us what Jesus is like so that we can believe. But in this story we also have a very powerful illustration of what being a Christian is like:

- Being a Christian, following Jesus is the best thing in the world, but it can also be a back-breaking, energy-sapping experience, full of tests and trials. The disciples were in the midst of the storm because they were doing what Jesus told them to do – go to the other side – so the storm is not a punishment for past sins; the path of

obedience to Jesus lay through the storm! Sometimes being a Christian is like that, is like rowing against the headwind all the time and there is no let up; then other days it is like sailing with the wind or soaring like an eagle; it is exhilarating! Facing difficult things is not a sign of God's disapproval; sometimes life is just like that and we have to be a Christian in the midst of the storm because doing God's will lies through the storm, through difficult things, and it can be back-breaking, energy-sapping.

- Jesus prays for us. Sometimes we feel as if God has forgotten all about us, or seems not to answer our prayers or is simply irrelevant to our lives, or, to continue the picture, is up on the hillside while we're out on the lake struggling for all we're worth. But here's a fascinating picture of Jesus watching His friends, praying for them in their struggle. Translate that picture into the reality of our lives and the same is true. Jesus prays for us in the midst of all that life throws at us; He prays that the Father will give us resources of strength, energy, resilience, and grace to battle.

- Jesus walks with us in the storm and brings us peace. Where is Jesus when life is hard? Right there with us by His Spirit. Where is Jesus when we're hurting? Hurting with us! Where is Jesus when everything is going against us? Right there beside us, feeling our pain, knowing our hard times and looking to help us. Then in surprising ways, He comes to us and brings us peace, help, strength. The Psalmist in Ps 91 describes all kinds of fears – *"terror of..."* (Ps 91:5,6) and yet has a sense of confidence that God is there with him, as his rest, refuge, shelter, and salvation. God is with His people in the storms that batter us; He brings us peace.

- But "smallness of faith and hardness of heart are two constant sins of God's people." (Cole) We are not ready to learn from our experience or from the Bible; our hearts are closed to this picture of Jesus and complain that God doesn't care; we're told over and over again of the love, power and strength that God has and gives, but we will not have it! Smallness of faith is about failing to take on board what we read of Jesus; so, for example, we think that God loves us a little, when in fact He has lavished His love upon us; we think that God can't help us much if at all, when in fact Jesus is able to help us in every situation in life.

Dougie and Fred had sore hands; their shoulders ached; they had cramp in their legs. They were kept going by their coach who was with them talking them through the problems and they were encouraged at the end by those who came to cheer them along. Being a Christian is great; the best thing about life is following Jesus, but there are times when we have sore hands from all that rowing (or whatever the life equivalent is!) or cramp or feel that we can't go on any more with life or faith; there are times when we cry out 'How long, O Lord before You answer my prayers?' There are things that make us afraid, that leave us feeling helpless. Jesus knows how we feel; He hears our cries; He prays for us and yes, even walks with us through these storms and brings us peace, lavishes love, sustains and supports us all along way. May God give us hearts to understand, to appreciate and to believe this Jesus!