

MATTHEW 8:23-27
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM...

Life got a whole lot stormier this week. The thing about storms is you're never sure quite what will happen next. If the wind were constant, you can adapt to that and deal with it, but in storms, the wind gusts and gets stronger suddenly and that's when you get knocked over, or the ship takes an unexpected lurch and you get frightened. You can build a house with roof that can stand 70mph winds, but when it gusts up to 120mph all of a sudden, that's when it begins to struggle. Then you have people-storms: who can predict what the next 4 years will look like, politically, across the world? Brexit is creating a storm of uncertainty across the UK and as if that's not enough, Donald Trump is elected and there will be any number of storms to come, if his campaign is anything to go by!

Jesus' friends are in the boat; Jesus is with them. They are probably crossing the Sea of Galilee, notorious for its storms and squalls. The sea is surrounded by hills and the winds come down the sides of the hills and across the sea and in minutes it can change from being flat-calm to being a turbulent piece of water, enough to disturb anyone not used to it. Some of the disciples were well-used to the sea, having been fishermen on this lake, but others were no sailors and perhaps they, more than the others, are disturbed by the sudden storm. They are afraid, understandably so, especially if this is the first time they have been on the water in a boat. They turn to Jesus for help and He is fast asleep. When they did waken Him up, he stilled the storm and they were amazed; Jesus is Lord of all creation, with power and authority even over storms! There is something appropriate about reading and reflecting on this story today of all days.

"Where is God when...?" How many people ask that question and it seems to be asked most often when life is hard, or stormy. Many men, after the First World War, came home asking the question "where was God when my mates were suffering?" and they came to the conclusion that God had gone away, that God had somehow abandoned them to their fate in the trenches. So they abandoned their Christian faith in bitterness and anger because God was not there anymore. But Jesus was in the boat with His disciples. He didn't leave them alone in the storm; He didn't abandon them to their fate. He was there, with them, in the boat, in the midst of the storm. Some people understood, quite profoundly, that Jesus was there in the trenches, suffering along with soldiers, Jesus of the scars; or that Jesus is at the bedside of someone suffering with cancer; or that Jesus is there when we're awake in the middle of the night listening for someone up out of bed, or that Jesus is Lord when the political world is in turmoil. Jesus is with us in the storms.

Jesus is asleep in the boat. There are two ways of understanding that: Mark's version of the story has the disciples accusing Jesus of not caring; "He's asleep, he doesn't care about us! *"Don't you..." (Mark 4:38)* and that's one way of seeing what's going on. There is another way: there is a calm and peace about Jesus in these situations; Jesus is never rattled by what is going on around Him, but meets every circumstance and situation with the same sense of peace and calm. He has that peace and calm because He knows that He is able to deal with it. Nothing rattles Him because nothing is too much for Him. He is asleep because He is calm and at peace in every situation. Not only is He at peace, but He exudes that same sense of peace to those who are anxious and frightened by His side.

That's the picture of Jesus that I'd like you to take away with you today, Jesus calm and peaceful as the storm is blasting all around Him. It is not peace and calm that means "I don't care about these people" but peace and calm that says "I have this under control!" There was

a posting on Facebook two weeks ago: “no matter who becomes president Jesus is still Lord!” That is not meant as a “head-in-the-sand” view of the world and politics, as if we don’t care about politics, but it is meant as a declaration of faith and trust in the One who has the world in His hands and who has our times in His hands. Jesus is calm and peaceful because He has all things in His hands and is able to help us, no matter what! Jesus cares passionately about our welfare, peace and salvation – why else would He have suffered and died on the cross? He cares for us more than we will ever know; so don’t blame Him for not caring! But, in all the circumstances of our life, He is able to help us; nothing is beyond His power to help, heal, save, or give peace. He has this air or calm and peace about Him.

When we pray “*Lord, save us*” He is able to help us. “*You of...*” (*Matthew 8:26*) As we have seen with many of these stories in Matthew 8, we are challenged to have faith and to trust. What is God doing in our world? What is God doing in our church? What is God doing in our lives? We’re never sure that we know the answers to these questions, but we learn to trust Him! We discover that He knows what He’s about, that He has everything under control, so we learn to trust. We learn to trust Him for the world; we learn to trust Him for His church; we learn to trust Him for our lives. There are people who are ill, but face up to it with a deep sense of peace and calm because they know that Jesus loves them; or people who deal with the most difficult circumstances but refuse to get flustered because they know that Jesus has everything in His hands. Trust – it’s a huge challenge!

Jesus is asleep in the boat: Take that picture away with you; chew on it; consider it; how do you like it? How does it seem to you? How does that picture of Jesus touch your life? Your circumstances? Your feeling frightened by life and the world? Let’s learn to trust this Jesus and find in Him our peace, our life, our salvation. The storms of life are many, but Jesus is with us in all of them; He is able to help us and save us completely.