

Pentecost 4- 20-06-21 - Bishop Cam Venables

Readings: 1Samuel 17:57 – 18:5, 10-16; Psalm 133; Corinthians 6:1-13; **Mark 4:35-41**

I wonder how you've been going this week? Do you have a sense that you are flourishing in life, or that you are floundering? And, if you feel like you're floundering what would need to change so that you could flourish? As we consider these questions, I think one of the ways we get new insight and guidance is through reading the Bible and each time we worship with a congregation, or in a small group, we hear at least one Bible reading.

Over the years I hope we have developed an expectation that in God's grace there'll be something in the Bible reading to help shape, guide, or inspire us. There may be wisdom that gives comfort, or challenge, or new questions... but, there'll always be something! On the way home from church each week we might then ask ourselves what God was trying to say to us in that time, and what might we do in response.?

For some people it will be a particular verse from the Psalm, while for others the phrasing of a hymn. For some it'll be a gift from the Old Testament reading, while for others it will be wisdom in one of Paul's letters. My 'go to' space of encounter is very often the Gospel reading, and I think it's because the Gospels, more than any other parts of the Bible, describe Jesus interacting with everyday people, like you and me.

The Gospel reading this week remembers Jesus travelling with his friends across the Sea of Galilee. It's not hard to imagine – a group of friends travelling from one place to another on a boat. Jesus was exhausted after a busy time of ministry and had fallen asleep on some cushions. A storm developed and even though many of the disciples were fishermen, the waves started to swamp the boat. I imagine them desperately bailing water, taking down the sail, and keeping the prow facing towards the waves. I imagine the wind howling, and a growing sense of unease within them. Every pair of hands would have been needed, so they woke Jesus but, after opening his eyes, he did not join the bailing team. Instead he commanded the wind and the waves to be still and immediately the wind dropped away, and the sea became calm.

Please picture with me the disciples standing there holding buckets, ropes, and rudder... astonished at what had just happened. Their clothes soaking wet, their bodies full of adrenaline, and their minds struggling to comprehend what they had just witnessed. Many of them were fishermen who understood the life-threatening challenge of severe storms... so, what in the world had just happened? Turning to them Jesus then asked why they had been afraid, and why they still had no faith. They were uncomfortable, speechless, and filled with awe... and, why wouldn't they be?

Let's begin by thinking of the boat as a metaphor for your life and mine. Do you have a sense that your sails are full, the sun is shining, and that you are travelling where you want to go? Or, is the sea a bit choppy at the moment, and the journey not that comfortable? Worse, do you have a sense that you're in the midst of a storm, and that the waves are swamping your boat while Jesus appears to be asleep and unconcerned?

'Why are you afraid? and, why have you still no faith?'

I am not suggesting that in the midst of life's storms all we have to do is wake Jesus up and we'll get the result we hope for. That would not be true to our lived experience of faith. Sometimes we get the result we hope for, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes the loved person recovers from serious disease or accident, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes there is reconciliation in a relationship, and sometimes there is none. Sometimes justice prevails, and sometimes it unrelentingly goes on. In

some circumstances we may even feel that the boat has sunk, and we have been left clinging to the wreckage!

Even in a broader context, if we think of the boat as a metaphor for Church and society – do we have sense that the sails are full, the sun is shining, and we are travelling where we want to go? Or, do we have sense that we are floundering, and we fear that at some stage... all will be lost?

Important to remember that Jesus was on the boat with his disciples and not far away. Similarly, in our lives, in the life of the Church, and in the life of the world... Jesus is with us and is not far away. Important to remember that in the same way Jesus did not respond to the storm in the way his disciples expected, so God may not respond to our various storms in the ways that we hope. Jesus did not bail out the boat or wail in anguish, but with quiet authority, brought peace and calm. Then he reminded the disciples that they need not be afraid, and that they should have faith.

I needed to hear the reminder that God is near for there's a whole lot of stuff going on in the world, and in the Church, that is worrying. Even as a parent I often worry about the safety and future of my children. Into these anxieties I ask Jesus for peace and calm... and in that calm space I ask to find ways forward. Into your experiences of storm – large and small - I pray similarly for you: that God give you peace and calm, and creative ways forward. Further, that we not be afraid, but in God's grace be filled with faith.

Would you please join me in prayer:

Holy God we give thanks for the gift of our lives, and for your love. We give thanks for being with us in times of plenty, and times of struggle. Through your Spirit strengthen our faith that, no matter our circumstance, we can know your peace. We pray in the name of the One who calmed the storm, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen