

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ 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?"

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.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Jesus calms the storm

Jesus calming the storm is one of those stories many of us have known since Sunday School. Last week we acted out this story in Open the Book for Middleton and Yoxford primary schools. It's a simple story — they're in a boat on the sea of Galilee — a storm whips up in the night. They wake Jesus, he calms the storm and goes back to sleep. They are astounded. Great. So has this story any power yet to remind us of Jesus's power, or our relationship to that power, or the nature of prayer and petition — and if we can expect this calming for the storms in our own lives? I think it still has power to spur our prayerful reflection on all these points.

Let's begin with the disciples. They have been slowly learning more about their rabbi and teacher. He has healed, and cast out demons and taught both shockingly and wisely. They are still learning about him. Peter's declaration that he is the Messiah is still chapters away — they're not ready to see or admit that yet.

Jesus has had a busy day, and in the boat he's not much use, so he is asleep, with his head on a pillow. The storm comes up, he still sleeps. And the disciples wake him up, and ask 'don't you care if we all drown!'

Now — what earthly good could the rabbi son of a carpenter do on a boat when there are four fishermen in the boat with him? Unless they somehow think that he *can* do some good? And if so, what do they expect? Perhaps they just want the good man to pray? They know the story of Jonah of course — another calmed storm — but they're not expecting him to jump out. He's not the problem! They are surprised by what happens next. He simply wakes up, rebukes the wind, tells the waves to calm down and pointedly asks the disciples if they still have no faith. In popular parlance, it was a mic drop moment.

What was it that so shocked the disciples? He had commanded demons to go, and he had healed. But this was *so big!* It was another level of miraculous. And it put them in mind of Moses.

Why do I think that? Because the exodus was the great national story for their self identity. Who are we? We are the ones the Lord brought out of slavery into liberty under his rule. And the great final act of that liberation was for Moses to raise his staff, calling the winds to push back the water so that they could cross the Red Sea on dry ground. Here again were the wind and the waves. But Jesus did not pray to the Father for peace on the lake — he just told the wind and waves to stop it, and they did.

That meant that he had all the power of God Almighty. And also, though they may not have thought of this immediately, it implied Jesus's power to lead his followers on a new exodus, into a new liberation. Nothing could stop them — even the wind and waves!

To recap and stress the most important points here — the disciples didn't even know if Jesus could do anything, but they woke him to ask (actually, they kind of told him off), and he simply put nature back in its place under his command.

For the disciples this was an act of salvation (they were sure they were going to drown), and proof of the great power that Jesus had, and his credentials as a new liberator of the people.

What about for us?

There are many storms in our lives, which may test us to the limit. For some it is work, or relationships or illness, or debt. For others it is the same, but these things happening to close members of their family — parents dying, spouses. Sometimes the struggles of trying to get your children the chances they need in life. During the covid pandemic we learned that we weren't all in the same boat, but we were in the same storm. The NHS has been enduring the storm of lack of money, staff, beds since before that pandemic, and has only gotten worse. And, speaking of wind and waves, we haven't yet mentioned climate change and that threat that however bad this may be for the poorest communities in the world we have *hardly begun* to reduce the usage of fossil fuels across the world. Will Jesus calm that storm?

Let's imagine different scenarios to calming the storm...

What if the disciples had woken Jesus because of their fear and anxiety and he had said 'Don't worry! See how calm I was, I could still sleep because I trust our Father, as you should. The boat won't sink!' That would have been reassuring, wouldn't it?

Or what if Jesus had calmed the storm *just enough*?

Or what if Jesus had said that neither he nor the Father interfered with things like that because that would set a precedent — and then what?

But the fact is that he did. He did the most possible, at the least prompting.

The disciples asked, and trusted him, somehow to do something, and he did. This has got me thinking how little I trust God to do stuff. One of my boys has had bad hay fever this year. I occasionally pray about it, but am I expecting help? Really? And the other things that stress me out, do I honestly offer these to Jesus seeking his help? So often it's easy to just endure this — it is what it is, as we say — and don't tell God about it.

God has not gone back on his promise of liberation. Jesus is still leading us and our world towards a greater freedom. We worship the same Jesus who calmed the storm, asked his disciples what they were worried about. Be assured!

Amen.