

We all want to rid ourselves of anxiety but how much do we want to humble ourselves under the Lord's mighty hand?"

We will soon enter Lent when we set time aside to look at our relationship with the Lord and to challenge ourselves as to the areas of our lives that are unyielded to him, parts of our boat that we have filled with those other than the Son of God. Storms are frightening both real and metaphoric ones, and we've all heard of the phrase 'Every cloud has a silver lining, well its true, and in Paul's letter to the Romans we read:

'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

(Romans 8:28)

Jesus doesn't take people out into the middle of the sea to drown them; he takes people across the sea so that they can participate in his work of redemption. He enters the darkness, the evil, the suffering of this world, and transforms it from within. And so the storm is not where we face our enemy; the storm is where we meet our God. It's in adversity.... when we come to the end of ourselves....that we see the power of God in our lives.

I know, as I'm sure you do what it is to cry out to God asking him to save me from the storm in my life. And at times the storm has raged still and I've felt as if my boat is sinking, but as of today my boat has still got to other side.... The best thing that can happen is for us is to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and while the devil can use the storms of our lives to make us anxious, afraid, hurt, and discouraged, God can use them to make us fearless, secure, and steadfast. Jesus is fully able to calm the storm in our lives, but even if he doesn't, we can trust that he will uphold us, and that we can believe he will transform us, and continue to love us....So to myself as well as to you I say.... Let us not lose heart. For though our outer self is wasting away, is at times frustrated and failing apart ...our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For as the apostle Paul reminds us in his second letter to the Corinthians:

"This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

(2 Corinthians 4:16-17)

Amen

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Sermon St. Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown

Luke 8:22-25

24.2.19 2nd Sunday before Lent - Who's in your boat?

A hurricane lifts over sixty million tons of water and generates more power every ten seconds than all the electrical power used in the United States in a year and the hurricane that struck Bangladesh in 1970 produced a tidal wave which killed at least half a million people.

A young lad was eagerly looking forward to the party of a friend. When the day arrived, a blizzard made the pavements and roads almost impassable. His dad, sensing the danger, hesitated to let his son go but after being badgered agreed. Overjoyed, he plunged into the storm, but the snow made visibility almost impossible, and it took him more than an hour to trudge the relatively short distance to the party. As he rang the doorbell, he turned briefly to look out into the storm. His eye caught the shadow of a retreating figure. It was his father...he had followed his son's every step to make sure he arrived safely.

There are lots of passages in scripture, which assure us that God is never far away.... that he has compassion on his children and that when storms come and anxiety ensues we should cast our cares upon him for he cares for us...But I wonder if like me you have ever experienced a storm in your life and wondered where on earth God was? ...If perhaps when you turned and looked you didn't sense the shadow of the almighty but rather felt swept away by your experience.

In 1990 thieves broke in and stole Rembrandt's 1633 painting of the storm on the Sea of Galilee - a picture of which is on your notice sheet.

It's considered one of the worst art thefts in American history and while there's a 10 million dollar reward for information leading to its discovery the case remains unsolved. The Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level, its 8 miles wide, 12 miles long and 200ft deep and when a storm hits the waves can reach over 10 feet high. When Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee we read that a storm struck and the waves threatened to sink the boat, but strangely we read that Jesus is asleep, its seems odd to me that someone would feel so calm that they would sleep through 10 feet waves hitting the boat.... Terrified, the disciples wake Jesus up and ask if he cares that they are about to drown.... Jesus gets up, tells the wind and waves to be still, and then asks the disciples why they are so frightened.

How is it that Jesus can be so casual about something so threatening?

I'm an avid Star trek fan and in the film *'The Final frontier'* Captain Kirk is climbing a mountain while his friend Dr. McCoy watches nervously through binoculars on the ground.... Spock interrupts Kirks climb and loosing his footing he falls...and its only because Spock catches him that his life is saved...Of course Dr. McCoy is furious and sitting around the fire later that night he chastises Kirk for his inability to take what happened seriously.... Kirk then says to his two friends, "I knew as I was falling that I wouldn't die because you two were with me.... I've always known that I'll die alone"

Jesus knew he wasn't going to drown, because all along he knew how he would die, he knew that his time wasn't done and that he had things to do, people to save, and a message to deliver.... maybe that's why he could sleep in a storm and why we are told not to be anxious when storms hit us in our lives.... because God is not taken by surprise when bad things happen to us....

We might think that this story is about storms but actually it isn't...the disciples think that their enemy is the weather, but its in the next few verses that Jesus reveals who the real enemy is as they encounter the Gaderene demoniac a man who lives amongst the tombs and who is so frightening that no one will go near him for fear of what he will do....

I'm sure that many of you have seen the film *the exorcist* or at least heard of it. What you might not know is that the film was based on a true story. I imagine that we've all heard of encounters with things that go bump in the night and while in our modern and technological world we might dismiss claims of poltergeist activity or the reality of malevolent evil spirits, the bible teaches that these beings are real and that they mean to do us harm...

As most of you know my masters dissertation is on the relevance of exorcism in the modern day church, and following my ordination I became one of the bishop's advisors on exorcism or what is now called deliverance ministry. The reason bishops have such advisors is because in 1974 in the Wakefield diocese a Methodist minister and an Anglican priest visited a man who claimed to be possessed. After performing the rite, which took many hours, the man went home and killed his wife citing that the devil told him to do it.

Even if we are dubious about the existence of demonic entities or personalities, I doubt any of us would deny the reality that awful acts are committed in their name.... A significant part of Jesus' ministry is to restore people's minds as well as their bodies and souls... And so often our minds are where our battles begin...Just as with the disciples, something happens and we get fearful, we begin to ruminate about the possibilities and before long we've lost sight of who is in the boat with us....

Prolonged illness, the death of a loved one, a loss of purpose, a marriage destroyed...any one of these can make us wonder if God is asleep and not paying any attention to what is going on...

In the book of Hebrews we are told to 'Look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith...' The Greek word 'aphorao' (af-or-ah'-o) 'To Look', means to consider attentively, and carries the idea that our eyes, our gaze should always be fixed on Jesus.

While crossing the US-Mexican border on his bike, Pedro was stopped by a border guard who pointed to the two bags on his shoulders.

"What's in the bags?", asked the guard.

"Sand," said Pedro. The guard then looked and just as he had been told saw only sand in the bags...but the Border guard was sure that this fellow was a smuggler. Even so, he told Pedro that he was free to go. So Pedro carefully scooped up the sand in his hands put it back into the bags and continued across the border. A week later, the same thing happened and again the border guard stopped Pedro and demanded to see what was in the two bags. Once again, they contained nothing but sand. "Maybe he's just testing me! Maybe he's going to keep doing this hoping that I'll quit searching his bags. Well, I know he's got to be a smuggler so I'll keep stopping him and searching those bags. That Mexican won't fool me!" This went on every week for six months and each time, the border guard found nothing but sand in Pedro's bags. One day, the guard was waiting for Pedro to appear with the sand bags, but he didn't come.... But a few days later, the guard happened to meet Pedro in El Paso.

"You have driven me crazy", said the guard. "I knew you were smuggling something across the border. I won't say a word - but what were you smuggling. A big grin spread across Pedro's face and he replied, "Bicycles!"

When we focus on the wrong things we miss what's most important....

The storm was real and terrifying and the disciples really thought that they were going to die, but they had the Son of God in the boat with them - what on earth could possibly go wrong.... Today's story challenges us that when storms hit, who is our boat...If its just the Dr, then we may, or may not get well... If its just the bank manager then we may or may not get the loan...If its our family and friends then we may or may not get the support we need, but if it's the Son of God who is in our boat when the storm hit, we will always get to the other side because its only him who can speak a word which truly silences the storms of our lives. In the book of Peter we read:

'Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:6-7)