

## [Mark 4:35-41](#)

This week in the south-east of England our weather has gone from the extreme heat of Wednesday with temperatures around 29C to rain and thunderstorms with the temperature not above 16C on Friday. We're used to the idea that a period of considerable heat can be broken by thunderstorms. Often we're grateful!

On the Sea of Galilee with its particular local geography they were used to sudden vicious squalls appearing, like the one in this story. However, they weren't welcomed, because they could be a threat to life, especially to those who made their living on Galilee from fishing.

Our story from Mark depicts on such naturally occurring storm, just as all sorts of naturally occurring events can disrupt our lives and plunge us into fear, as it did Jesus' disciples.

But alongside the naturally occurring threat are hints of something else. Jesus and his disciples are striking out on a new stage of his kingdom of God proclamation. 'Let us go over to the other side' (verse 35) is not an idle comment. It's not like saying, 'Let's cross the road.' Jesus wanted to go from the Jewish side of Galilee to the Gentile side. He wanted to go from the place where people sought to be true to the faith (although some of the most fiercely devout people opposed him) to a place where what was practised was dodgy and often heretical.

Not only that, he also leaves the crowd behind (verse 36). Fancy leaving behind all these people he has built up. But he does.

So imagine that for his disciples this is about leaving behind the familiar and the successful for a venture into an area that didn't traditionally practise conventional and orthodox forms of faith. Jesus is extending the reach of the kingdom outside natural comfort zones. It's something we in the church often don't like to do. We'd prefer to stay with people who are just like us, with whom we feel safe. But the ministry of Jesus is rarely safe!

In that context we might see the storm differently, and not least because when Jesus wakes on the boat and responds to the disciples' plea, we read that he 'rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'' (verse 39). This is the sort of language he uses in exorcisms! It's as if Jesus sees demonic

opposition behind the storm, which is not surprising if this boat ride is a journey to extend the kingdom.

Add to that the fact that Mark borrows some language here from Jonah chapter 1, where Jonah the reluctant missionary finds himself on a boat in a storm, and you have further evidence why it's not far-fetched to see a mission dimension to this story.

And maybe that's why we like to stay safe. We know that the call of Jesus may put us into tricky and risky situations. It will. But rather than saying 'No thank you, I'll stay at home,' this story gives us reason to go on that risky adventure with Jesus.

I want you to have in your minds any challenging call you have from Jesus. It might be the general challenge most churches are facing at present to navigate a new future in a world scarred by COVID-19. It might be that Jesus is calling you or your church to a new form of outreach that is beyond your experience or involves people you don't naturally like.

And I also want you to hold at present any of the ordinary storms of life that may be buffeting you. Serious illness, bereavement, job losses, problems in your family, and so on.

Into those storms come two truths about Jesus.

**Firstly, Jesus is *present* in the storm.**

Sometimes when we are in a storm it feels like Jesus isn't there. Or we might acknowledge his presence in theory, but to all practical ends it feels like he isn't or he might as well not be.

I suppose it was something like the latter for the disciples here. They knew he was there but 'was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion' (verse 37). And maybe we can identify with them waking him and saying, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' (Verse 38)

Perhaps we should ponder, then, from this story what it means when we know Jesus is present in our storm, but we aren't hearing much from him. Could it be the equivalent to him being asleep here? But rather than that indicating his lack of care for us, is it actually a sign to say, 'It's all right, I've got this'?

Could it be that Jesus is quiet in our storms because he is saying to us through his silence that we don't need to fear? Could it be that this is an occasion

where Jesus shows his will for us not in his words but in his example? He is not afraid of the storm, and we don't need to be either, seems to be the message of him sleeping in the stern.

On this subject, I used to quote the lyrics of a song by an artist who used to be known as Leslie Phillips (no, nothing to do with the British actor of 'Ding dong!' fame, this Leslie Phillips is female and American). She is now known as Sam Phillips, which confuses her with someone else.

Anyway, she wrote a song called 'Answers Don't Come Easy' that is relevant to this idea that Jesus is present in the storm, even when he's not speaking to us. The chorus says this:

Oh, and I can wait  
It's enough to know you can hear me now  
Oh, I can wait  
It's enough to feel so near you now  
And when answers don't come easy  
I can wait

I want to assure you that whatever storm you are facing, whether it's the risky adventure of following Jesus out of our comfortable church existence into mission in the world or whether it's a painful life crisis, he is with you. His silence speaks. And his silence tells you that even as the elements rage he's still in charge.

I invite you to find that silence in the middle of the storm.

The **second** truth is that **Jesus is *in charge* during the storm.**

When Jesus gets up and stills the storm, some English Bible translations have it that he says 'Peace!' but he doesn't. If it were, you would have the Greek word *eirene* here from which we get the girl's name Irene.

The NIV which we read gives a better flavour when it says he 'rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'' (verse 39). The natural elements are given a telling-off by Jesus! It's like even the elements here are in disobedience to him and he commands their obedience.

You might say his words are like scolding naughty children, but it's stronger and that word 'rebuked' gives the game away. As I said earlier, this is exorcism language. Every part of creation, not just human beings, is commanded to come under obedience to Christ. One day, as Paul told the Philippians, every

knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). Or as Charles Wesley put it in his hymn 'Jesus, the name high over all',

Angels and men before it fall  
And devils fear and fly.

Now you may say that day isn't here yet. We don't always see the storm calming down. And you would be right. The kind of dramatic intervention by Jesus that happens in our story today isn't an everyday occurrence, although maybe sometimes we're too scared to ask.

No, we're not yet at that time Paul prophesies about in Philippians where every knee will bow, and so in the meantime sometimes Jesus saves us from the storm and sometimes he saves us through the storm.

But rest assured of one thing. The storm will not have the final word. Jesus will. For we are people of resurrection faith.

So in **conclusion**, how might we respond when we are in a storm? Well, if we can appreciate that Jesus is present, even when silent, and if we can believe that he is in charge, even as we wait for the fulness of his kingdom, then I pray our faith and trust in him will grow and we shall not hear him say to us as he did to his first disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' (Verse 40)

Instead, while they then wondered and pondered, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!' (verse 41), may we, who know who he is, turn our wondering into worship and our pondering into trust.