

The three Gospel accounts of the stilling of the storm make it very clear that the people in the small boat thought that they were going to die. These were people of the sea: many of the disciples earned their living in boats, and those I know who do the same have an enormous respect for these elements of wind and water. I don't think the disciples wake Jesus up because it's a bit choppy. They wake him up because their lives are about to end. Mark's version of the event has a wonderful incidental detail about Jesus being asleep on a cushion. I can imagine Peter, who is reputed to have known Mark the Evangelist, remembering that detail. Sometimes in moments of extreme panic a little thing sticks in the mind. When I crashed a car once and ended upside down in a ditch, I clearly remember that the Shipping Forecast had just got to "Smiths Knoll Automatic". Years after the incident Peter still remembers the cushion.

And Jesus saves them. He is calm about himself - he's asleep after all, totally secure in the knowledge of the love and the purposes of his Father. In Matthew Jesus speaks first to the disciples, about faith. Only then does he address the wind and the waves - which as the second person of the Trinity he had called into being at the beginning of all things - and tells them to be still. He shows the disciples that his care for them is total and more powerful than they could ever imagine. If they were frightened before, when they realise what Jesus has done they are even more stunned and awed. They thought they knew him, and now they realise they know very little. "Who is this? Even the wind and waves listen to him and do what he says".

Those of you who have been up in the roof here will know that the wooden frame is like the timbers of a ship. They could have - perhaps they were - been designed and made by ship builders. Turn the church over and you have the hull of a ship, built to withstand the battering of waves and the shattering of the wind, just as the double scissor beams above us withstand the storms from which there is no other shelter. The earliest readers and hearers of this story understood that the boat could be seen as the church, the waves and wind seen as the persecutions and attacks they were undergoing, the crew could be seen as the faithful followers of Christ. This is called a Nave - *navis* - a ship, after all.

What we are promised here is not plain sailing, a luxurious cruise across a millpond like Mediterranean. There will be storms. Why should Christians be immune from the things which assail all humans? For us as individuals there will be illnesses to face, devastations out of the blue, things which don't go quite right, relationships which crack and bring pain. For the church there will be challenges at every turn: a Bishop I know said the Episcopal life was like white water rafting with unknown rocks at every turn. In the world there are upheavals and we know them only too well as we feel the effects of economic devastation and look at political turmoil, religious violence and the displacement of huge numbers of people every night on our screens.

This is not plain sailing, and all too often we can turn on God and yell with real anger "Save us! We are perishing?" And Christ, who is with us in our little boat, and over us as the one who has made all things, points us to his presence with us, and to the ultimate sign of his care. For when the storm of death, the storm of hatred and destruction swirls around him on the Cross, he knows he could call down legions of angels, knows he could smooth it all out. But he has shown he can still such storms. The fact that he does not smooth it all out,

the fact that the floods run over him, means that this was no mistake. His being engulfed by the waters of his own death is the answer to the disciples cry: "Lord, save us", to the cry in Mark's Gospel of "do you not care?" Christ's care for us is such that he takes the greatest storm into himself, and removes its sting from us.

Thanks be to God that there is no storm, no overwhelming, that can separate us from that love. And should our prayer not now be that we make this place a place of welcome and safety and support and rescue for the perishing? This week the Archbishop of Canterbury was said to have described the worldwide Anglican Church as concentrating so much on keeping each other in the boat that we weren't rowing anywhere. I would add that all too often our actions as Christians are about throwing each other out of the boat. But we have been saved. This *navis*, this boat, will not perish, perish because Christ has perished for us and has been raised. Our cry should be 'here we are! Here is Christ! Hold our hand, as we hold his, and all will be well.'