

# The storms of life ...

## *... calmed by the power of Jesus*

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*A sermon given on the Second Sunday before Lent, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022 by the Associate Vicar the Revd Wendy Wale in Beverley Minster*

*Luke 8:22-25*

I imagine that every Anglican vicar in the country who uses the set readings that most of us use was looking at the storm this week and thinking about their sermons this morning. All except one maybe: the Reverend Claire Towns - who is a friend of my husband, Tom - she looked at the storm and she saw the steeple fall off the top of her church. You may have seen the news story down in Wells; grateful, of course, that no one was injured and the damage wasn't as bad as it might have been, but the image of the top of that church tumbling down, or perhaps the roof ripping off the O2 London, or the trees falling around the country, give us a perfect backdrop to our reading that we heard from Luke's gospel. Storms happen, and the impact they have is dependent on three factors. Firstly, how intense the storm is, how strong the wind, how cold the temperature, whether it features snow or rain or a hurricane. Secondly, how close something is to the centre of the storm - here in Beverley we were on the tail end of what hit the south much harder. And finally, the weakness of the objects in its path. The storm will find your loose tiles, your flimsy fences - we've got most of ours down much to Jonah's delight when it comes to cat-chasing - your unsecured tent, trampoline, wheelie-bin, garden shed, or vulnerable church steeple.

The Sea of Galilee is deep in the Great Rift Valley in Jordan, separating the African and Arabian plates. It's an area that has seen volcanic and earthquake activity. Due to its low lying position and surrounded by Hills, the sea can get hit by sudden and violent storms. We can only imagine that the one we heard about this morning was particularly bad because many of the disciples came from fishing backgrounds, and so the storm wouldn't have been a surprise and they would usually have known how to handle it. But we're told that the boat is filling up with water and they are afraid.

Now many of you will know many of the stories about Jesus' life are told with exaggeration to help us see some of the different messages within the story. The fear of the sea-loving disciples is contrasted with the carpenter Jesus gently snoring throughout it all. We're meant to see Jesus's authority in rebuking the storm, and its

stopping as fast as it began. We hear him rebuke the disciples for not having enough faith, which to me seems a little harsh because if you put me in a boat on a Lake in a storm that's starting to sink, I too would be a little more than anxious and probably very green (but we won't go into that). But the point of the story is perhaps summed up by its final line, *"Who then is this?"*

Throughout the Gospels, each of the writers is inviting us as readers to journey with them to answer that very question, "Who then is this Jesus?" Each incident and story adds another piece to the puzzle culminating in his death and resurrection. But the extended question for us today reads, *"Who then is this that commands even the winds and the water and they obey him?"*

If we'd had time this morning for our Old Testament reading, it was from Genesis, speaking about creation, the beginning. And James read to us that beautiful passage from Revelation, an incredible word picture of what it will be like at the end, when all things are made new, when all the storms have ceased, when all of creation is in harmony, in worship. All the clues, the readings, together point towards Jesus as the one who is Lord of all time and all creation, the beginning and the end; the one, of course, who is God.

I was delighted as I walked into the building earlier this morning and Paul said to me, "Turn around, Wendy" and there was an incredible rainbow stretching right across Beverley - the beginning and the end, the Lord of all creation.

And of course, like called is good detective novels, it's very easy for us to join the dots and to see the answer once we've got right to the end and we're looking backwards. But at the moment, sitting soaked and shaken in the boat, it's easy to see why the disciples were asking the question, for Jesus is the one who has the power to calm the storms. What does that mean for us today? Well, for some of us, we might still be piecing together the clues about who Jesus is. And in the next few weeks, running up to Easter, it will be a great time to keep exploring and learning more. Jonathan is planning another great series of films during Lent that will invite us all to look at the clues from fresh perspectives and to connect the themes of faith to the realities of life. But for many of us, perhaps, we relate most closely with the disciples. We are feeling battered and soaked by the storms of life, as well as perhaps the literal storms of the past week. We're struggling to make sense of life from the eye of the storm.

But as I said earlier, storms happen and the impacts they have depend on three factors. Firstly, how intense the storm is, how many things hit at once: relationship problems; health problems, mental or physical; financial worries; bereavements; moving house or job; lacking a house or job; having small children to care for; or wishing you had children to care for; missing someone to care for you - the list goes on.

Secondly, how close you are to the centre of the storm - the more directly responsible you feel for the consequences of the storm, the harder it hits. I spoke to my friend days after her son took his own life, an event that layered onto multiple other close and complex situations. There were no simple words to make any of it okay - there never will be.

And finally the storm will find the areas where there are already weaknesses: you might just about be managing the finances and then the cooker breaks; you might be clinging on to your marriage and then one of you tips into depression; your child might have sought help for their self harm and then the bullying begins again.

As a Church, as followers of Jesus, we know that he is in the boat with us; the Lord of all time and creation has not abandoned us. When the disciples reached desperation point, they woke Jesus up and called on him for help. And I wonder what it means for us as a Church to be alongside one another through the storms? There may be times when people in our midst are unable to call for help - the storm is just so overwhelming. How can we sit alongside them and call upon Jesus on their behalf, holding their pain and darkness to the light of the world?

All of creation is not yet in harmony but when we recognise Jesus in our midst; when we join in the worship of the angels in song, in prayer in the bread and the wine in our daily lives we are perhaps reminded that our boat is still afloat; that we are never alone; but there are other pairs of hands to help us bail out the water; to offer us a blanket to warm us up; to seek someone to dare to share our fears with; to speak out the extent of our storm.

And perhaps when we are speaking with people this week we might ask them, "What storms are you facing?" And as we sit and listen deeply to their answers, may the power of Jesus who brings calm and hope, be with us all.

## Reading Texts

### **Luke 8:22-25**

<sup>22</sup> One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, <sup>23</sup> and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. <sup>24</sup> They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup> He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'