

# It's Faith that Saves ...

## *... and it's OK to be blunt with God*

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*A sermon given on the Fourth Sunday of Trinity, 23rd June 2024 – by Revd Canon Peter Wadsworth, in Beverley Minster*

*Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-end*

It has been calculated that if you took all the events of Jesus's ministry from the time that he comes out of the wilderness after the temptation, right through to Palm Sunday, you could actually compress them into rather less than two months. Given that he was, we think, ministering for about 2-3 years, it means there's an awful lot that we don't get. In fact St. John says that there are whole books that could be written more about what Jesus did and said. So it's safe to assume that the evangelists when they came to write their gospel, were very careful about what stories they selected and what they thought was really important to get into the message that they were giving. It's therefore also reasonable, I think, to assume that any story we have, whether it's a miracle, a healing miracle, a nature miracle, whatever it may be, works at a number of different levels. Some obvious, some less obvious, and some that we may find difficult to spot because we come from a different culture, we have different backgrounds, we have different background knowledge - and that's very true of this story this morning: it's not very long; it's only about half a dozen verses; on the face of it, it's just a very dramatic incident.

Jesus and the disciples are going from the Capernaum side (or even the Tiberius side), over to the other side, the country of the Gerasenes. Jesus is having what in modern parlance would be called 'downtime' - that is, he is exhausted from his ministry and he's taking this opportunity to have a rest. (By the way, I love that little detail - I wonder who supplied the cushion.) The Sea of Galilee is known for its storms - it's all to do with the hills that surround it and the direction of the winds and things - to this day, it's known for sudden bursts of very stormy weather. But this must have been a very particularly a bad storm, because remember that most of the disciples in this boat were fishermen. They got their livelihood from the lake. They knew its moods and what it could do. The fact that they were so terrified must mean that this was, even by the sea of Galilee's standards, a particularly vicious storm. But it doesn't wake Jesus up. In the end, they're so terrified that they really reproach him - they wake him up and complain to him that he isn't doing anything to save them. At which point, Jesus calms the storm, reprimands them for a lack of faith, and they are suitably awestruck by his power.

If you then, as it were, peel off that top layer, there are other things going on underneath. First of all, the sea and water were seen as elements that were unpredictable - they were full of danger. Interestingly enough, the Israelites were not a sea-going people. Not like the Phoenicians and the Canaanites down on the coast, or the Egyptians who zigzagged across the ancient Mediterranean, or the Greeks. From what we know of them, the Israelites were very much a landlocked people in every sense. The sea was a dangerous element - it was a symbol of chaos, even of godlessness. But Jesus is not perturbed by it or its moods - he sleeps through the storm; he is quietly confident.

And so they wake him up. This idea of waking God up has another level to - if you go back to the Psalms, for instance, you will find there are a number of occasions when the Psalmist really complains to God, 'Why aren't you saving your people?' 'What are you not doing for us.' There's even one Psalm 44 [v 23ff], where the Psalmist has the cheek to actually blame God for being asleep on the job. He actually says, '*Are you asleep? Wake up, do something.*' I think the original readers and hearers of this gospel story would have had that in mind, that what the disciples were doing, as it were in extremis, was something that Jews had always done, that they had that relationship with God, which allowed them to really be very blunt at times, particularly when they thought God was not coming up to scratch.

Of course, Jesus creates calm. Then he ticks off the disciples for their lack of faith. Actually, if you look at the story, there are actually three rebukes, one after another. First of all, the disciples rebuke Jesus for being asleep and sleeping through the storm and not doing something about it. Then Jesus rebukes the storm and makes it calm. Finally, he rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith. Well, quite frankly, I don't know about you, but if I was in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in an exceptionally bad storm and my supposed leader and saviour was fast asleep, I think I'd panic and I'd wake him up fairly roughly.

Of course, they are awestruck. That's where that first lesson from the Book of Job comes in. It's a most wonderful passage (and there's more of it) - Job has been complaining, and basically God says, 'Well, were you around when the Earth was made? Did you have anything to do with all of this? Well, stop complaining then.'

And so in this sense, this story confirms the identity of Jesus. He is not just a teacher, he's not just a healer. He is the Son of God who can command creation itself because he was there in creation at the beginning. Remember those first words of St John's gospel? '*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*' Jesus has command of the forces of nature, and therefore he is saying to his disciples, 'Do not be afraid. This is not beyond me. This is within my power, and it's within my desire to save you.'

So, no matter how bad things are, they are not outside the power of God to deal with, and that God will deal with these things in His own way. That although we might get ticked off for our lack of faith, we may also, as it were, be blunt with God. We can say what we really think. And that faith can do things which are seemingly impossible. There is another story about Jesus on the Lake, and that's the one where he appears to them walking across the Lake. Peter thinks, 'Oh, I can... Yeah.' He has enough faith to get out of the boat, but it doesn't last very long. If you remember, he starts to sink. Jesus has to put an arm out and save him. Once again, he is ticked off for his lack of faith.

So then we need to go on putting faith in God and recognising that He is the one who saves, both personally and at the bigger level. We need to hold on to that at times when things seem in our world so bad, so dangerous, and we feel so utterly powerless. Remember, too (this is worth remembering for all of us) that those disciples who are terrified in the boat, who will be terrified again when he is arrested and they run away - nevertheless, they will become by Christ's own choice, the foundations on which the church is built and on which it continues to stand.

# Reading Text

## Job 38:1-11

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:*

<sup>2</sup> *'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*

<sup>3</sup> *Gird up your loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.*

<sup>4</sup> *'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.*

<sup>5</sup> *Who determined its measurements-surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?*

<sup>6</sup> *On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone  
<sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together  
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?*

<sup>8</sup> *'Or who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb?-*

<sup>9</sup> *when I made the clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,*

<sup>10</sup> *and prescribed bounds for it  
and set bars and doors,*

<sup>11</sup> *and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stopped"?"*

## Mark 4:35-end

<sup>35</sup> *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'* <sup>36</sup> *And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.* <sup>37</sup> *A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.* <sup>38</sup> *But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'* <sup>39</sup> *He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'* *Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.* <sup>40</sup> *He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'* <sup>41</sup> *And they were filled*

*with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*