

Where is your faith? ...

... here, sleeping alongside you!

A sermon given on the Second Sunday before Lent, 23rd February 2025, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

Luke 8:22-25

"Where is your faith?"

In this story about Jesus exercising authority over the storm on the lake and by implication, authority over all of creation, the authority of the creator. In this story, Jesus doesn't actually say very much that's reported. His only reported words take the form of a question directed at the disciples with him in the boat, *"Where is your faith?"* It's the question that hangs over this story and perhaps addresses you and me here this morning - where is *your* faith? There are, of course, many people today who lack faith, but often it's an absence that is regressive - many atheists recognise the benefits of faith but feel that they cannot square it with their intellectual integrity. But it does rather depend upon whom or what you are placing your faith in: many Christians have faith in the wrong kind of God; many atheists reject faith because they too are thinking of the wrong God.

So let's look at some of the different aspects of faith raised by this story. It begins by saying, *'One day, Jesus 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.'* Now, you might have thought that this is a description of the disciples having faith in Jesus: they are following him; they are paying attention to him; they respond to his suggestion to go across the lake. In short, they seem to be doing all the things you might expect believing people to do when they have faith in Jesus. Yet when it comes down to it, Jesus still asks them, *"Where is your faith?"* I don't know about you, but I find that very thought-provoking. For many of us, a willingness to follow Jesus, to spend time with him, to pay attention to him, to listen to him and try to obey his wishes is the very definition of faith. - these activities must involve some degree of faith; it's got to be better than ignoring Jesus altogether. But clearly, it doesn't impress him. Clearly, if this is faith, it's very much an entry-level, kindergarten kind of faith. What does real faith look like? Well, a bit later in the story, we see a slightly different expression of faith: the storm blows up; the boat was filling with water, and they are in danger. So in fear of their lives, the disciples go to Jesus, wake him up, and cry, *'Master, master, we are perishing.'* Well, isn't that faith? When we turn to Jesus in moments of crisis and helplessness, and we just cry out to him - not trying to control the agenda, not trying to determine the outcome, but just acknowledging our frailty and our need. *'Master, master, we are perishing'* - isn't that the prayer that so often springs from our lips? How often have you prayed a prayer like that? - on the motorway, when the lorry in front switches lanes without signalling; when the doctor shows you an X-ray with an ominous shadow in the middle of it; when you discover the reason your child is so quiet after school is because they're being bullied. We turn to Jesus in our fear and anxiety and cry out, *'Master, master, we are perishing.'* - we're out of our depth here; we don't know what to do. Jesus may or may not respond to that prayer. But the experience of those first disciples was that Jesus didn't regard their fear as an expression of faith. He calms the storm and then says to them, *"Where is your faith?"*

So, in the middle of this storm on the lake, with the boat filling with water and a very present danger of drowning, what does real faith look like? We sometimes forget that Jesus is not just the Son of God in whom we place our trust, he is also the Son of Abraham who shows us what it means to trust the Father. The thing in this story which I find most surprising, more surprising even than Jesus's authority over the wind and the waves and the natural world - the thing I find surprising is the fact that in the middle of it all, Jesus is asleep. And what's more, he doesn't welcome being woken up, even if the boat is foundering. And once we've noticed that, and once we've registered that Jesus's question, "*Where is your faith?*" is an implied criticism of the disciples, we're driven to the conclusion that to show real faith in this situation would have meant leaving Jesus fast asleep. Now, the disciples think that Jesus being asleep is a kind of negligence. In Mark's gospel, where this story is also told, they wake Jesus up saying, '*Master, don't you care that we are perishing?*' - they're almost wagging their fingers at him saying, 'Come on, do something.' They expect Jesus to reflect their fear and agitation. Whereas it's clear they should have found the fact that Jesus was asleep in the middle of a storm profoundly reassuring. If Jesus is okay with staying asleep during the storm, then there's probably nothing to worry about: Jesus is in control; he's master of the sea and sky; it's all okay.

So what does that say about your faith and mine? When the storms of life hit us and we feel vulnerable and at risk, do we expect God simply to reflect back at us our own sense of panic? Do we expect him to say, 'Oh deary me, things have got out of hand here, haven't they? I'd better do a bit of dramatic intervention.' Or do we trust that this is truly God's world and that he has authority over the wind and the waves, and that in a world where storms are always blowing up, the important thing is not that God calms them, but that He is there with us in the boat; that nothing can happen to us that does not also happen to Him; and that faith means trusting not that God will fix our problems and stop anything bad from happening to us in a world which doesn't feel like God is really in control, but faith instead means looking to Jesus to show us how to trust the Father in the midst of the storm. Faith means looking to Jesus to stand with us so that we may never be alone or abandoned in the storm; faith means looking to Jesus as the bearer of resurrection hope so that even if the boat does go down, that will not be the end of the story.

So where is your faith? Your faith is here, sleeping alongside you in the boat; your faith is a source of peace and tranquillity because it reflects the peaceful trust of the saviour himself in the faithful Father; your faith is in the one who has authority - the authority of the Creator over the wind and the waves, and the authority of the redeemer over the powers of sin and death, and the authority of the Holy spirit, the Comforter, from whose presence nothing can separate you.

So be of good cheer, have faith, and know that whatever storms you navigate, none can or will finally overwhelm you.

Reading Text

Luke 5:1-11

²² 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, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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?'