

23rd June 2024 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

GOD'S PEACE IN LIFE'S STORMS

Water is a fascinating thing for us, isn't it? We know that we need it for life, but there is more to it than that. We like to look at it, to walk and live beside it. Why is that? Is it because it is the most common liquid state of matter on our planet, so it moves, shapes, changes moods more than any other matter or thing that we know of? Is it because we can float on it, or because in looking at it we know there is a whole lot happening beneath the surface which we can't see? Perhaps it is because so much life is concentrated beside, on, and under water? Or, do you prefer not to think about the 'why?' and just enjoy it? And then, in looking at water, do you prefer the smooth glassy surface which you feel you could just step out and walk on, and which perhaps give you a sense of calm and order? Or do you like the waves with their constant motion and which, while it can be turbulent to be caught up in them, can also provide us with a sense of calm and peace when we look at them?

There is no doubt that probably because our lives rely on it, and that we do feel such an attraction and fascination with it, that water has always played such a big part in our lives as people. And this also comes out in the Bible. In the Flood story water is the means of God's judgment on sin, but on the flip side of that water is the means by which God's promises of life and forgiveness in Baptism come to us. There are numerous times in the Old Testament when people are thirsty either because of drought or they are wandering through the desert, and God provides water for them as a sign of His love and care. And in the New Testament we have a number of accounts of Jesus showing His power as God by calming storms, and even walking on water. If water is to be seen as not just life giving, but also a realm in which danger and evil can reign, Jesus shows that He has both the power to defeat this evil and the desire to care for His people.

Looking at both how we see water come into play in the relationship between God and His people in the Bible, and what we go through in our lives each day, we can perhaps paraphrase Forest Gump and say, 'Life is like a body of water'. Sometimes it is nice and smooth, glassy even, so you can just skim along on top of it, step out on it, and maybe even put your head down below the surface because everything will be crystal clear down there as well. All is calm, all is smooth, all is happy. Think about your life fitting into that picture; when do you feel like that? It might be when things are going well for you in your life, your relationships, your work or business. Lining up with this your family may all be well and happy with life going great for them also. Perhaps the time when you most feel like you are on a calm sea is when things have been rough, but then good medical results, a change in your life, or even just a holiday, smooths the waters out for you. When are the times in your life, or what are the situations, when you feel like you are on that calm, flat, unending ocean, with no threat of waves to come along and rock the boat in any way at all?

And the opposite of the calm seas is the rough waves, and while many of us may enjoy looking at them from a distance not many of us like being out on them in a boat, and we certainly don't like experiencing those waves in our lives. For us, like the waves on the ocean, they can be the result of a slow build up so we know they are coming, or they can come suddenly, unexpectedly, without notice suddenly stirring up the calm and smooth life we had been quietly sailing through. For you, what are the waves you have experienced in the past, are perhaps feeling the effects of right now, or maybe can see building up on your horizon? A broken relationship, or conflicts in a relationship that we really want to mend but can't see how to do that. Grief over the loss of someone close to us in our lives, either recently or a long time ago. A bad health diagnosis for ourselves or someone close to us. Worries over our work, our financial situation, the cost of living or where to live, what to do in the next stage of our lives. There are many things that can threaten the calm smooth waters we prefer, aren't there? Some give us warning of their coming, and others just come and hit us hard. Some may be ripples or only small waves by themselves, but when they come together with others they build up to waves which really rock our boat.

And then also, what about the times when you believe that someone is smoothly sailing along, and that to you and most people it seems their life is always calm and smooth, so we can easily be envious of them. The reality is that, very possibly, underneath the surface they are paddling hard to stay afloat and deal with everything pushing against them in life.

The rough seas, we all have them, at different times, in varying degrees, for different reasons, with different effects on ourselves. And generally, they are times we don't like to go through. To make the metaphorical into reality there are number of occasions like we have here in the Bible where the disciples found themselves on rough seas. And when this happened, they called out to Jesus for help. And on those occasions Jesus showed both His power and His compassion when by His words He stood up and simply by His command He told the wind and the waves to be quiet, to be still, and He brought calm. Maybe that's another reason we find water so fascinating, it's not always possible for us to control it; we regularly see and experience its destructive power. But Jesus calmed the waters for them.

For us, the calm and peace Jesus brings may not always be in Him making the waters flat and smooth again; even in the midst of the storms and waves we can have calm and peace. Doesn't sound right, does it? But the peace God offers to us through the presence of Jesus in our lives doesn't always take away or smooth out what we are going through. The hurt, the sorrow, the anger, the grief, the sadness, the worry, the struggle may still be with us because the things which cause them are a part of our life. But in Jesus we hear God's words; "it's ok, I'm here. I will help you through. I will help you up. You are in a storm, but I am in it with you. Together we can ride it out. I love you, and nothing will change that."

We know this, but we still have our doubts and struggles about it, don't we? Many of the disciples were fishermen so would no doubt have experienced the fierce storms Lake Galilee was known for back then and still today, but they were scared. They had all already seen some of Jesus' power, knew of His love and compassion for people, but could still accuse Him in their fear, 'Don't you care?' Do you ever feel like that when no matter how much you pray about a situation, or no matter how hard you try to hand something in your life over to God and trust Him it doesn't seem to improve, and you

feel overwhelmed? It would be great to be like young David, wouldn't it, who going out to face giant Goliath could say, 'I don't need fancy armour or weapons because I know God is with me'? I would love to always have faith like that in facing my giants in life.

But like the disciples, like David at many other times in his life, and like everyone who has ever lived, including Jesus, there are times when we struggle, when we doubt, when we know God is with us but still we struggle, we get rocked around, when what we face might threaten to over come us. These are the times for us to remember all of God's promises for us. This is when we can come back to the life-giving waters of our baptism and remember the promises God made for us there. In the Bible stories of Jesus overcoming storms, and many others of His power and love for us, we can focus on God being with us always, in whatever we go through. And ultimately, in His death on the cross for us we see His love as great as it is, and then in rising from the dead we see His power to be with us and bring us through whatever we now go through.

Through Jesus, God's peace now comes to us in life's storms. We love the times when life is smooth sailing, and thank God we have them. We also know there are unavoidable times when things will get rough, when we may even feel we can't get by alone, and thank God that His peace and love are with us in these times also. As we sail the waters of life, know that Jesus is always with us in the boat, and pray for the faith and the trust to always look to Him and His love to bring us through whatever we face. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- When are the times in your life when you feel you are sailing along on smooth waters? When are the times you feel like you are being thrown around on a rough sea which threatens to overwhelm you?
- Do you ever experience the peace of God in the midst of your storms? How does this peace come to you? How does it feel to you?
- If your life, or a part of your life, right now feels like it is in rough and stormy waters, bring this God. Pray for His peace and guidance, and ask Him to help you to look to His strength and love to bring you through whatever is tossing you around.

Pray: thank God for the times of smooth sailing we enjoy in our lives. Ask God to help us to look to and trust Him in the rough times we go through also.

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