Sermon-Sunday June 23rd

Today we’re looking at Jesus calming the storm Mk. 4: 35-42-a well known episode with one detail often cited, rightly, as evidence that it was an eye witness account-(v 3) the Lord Jesus” in the stern sleeping on a cushion.” It’s the sort of detail seldom found in fabricated tales. To us it gives the wrong impression-it was not a comfy cushion in the stern of a punt-rather a leather seat used as a head rest! More seriously, we will look at the two responses to the storm-that of the disciples & that of the Lord.

1. The Disciples. 1. As v 33 makes clear the Lord’s teaching ministry was going full blast-He needed to stop so He gave the order to go West to East across the Sea of Galilee. It had been a tiring day, so He needed to slip away from the crowds-He had, probably, been teaching from the boat-“just as He was” (v 36). The disciples obeyed, expecting nothing untoward to happen. They were part of a flotilla.

2. They were experienced fishermen, who knew Galilee well &, possibly, were relying on that. They knew that there were sudden, occasional & unpredictable storms-something to do with the high hills round the lake punctuated with narrow valleys, down which the wind could whistle.

3. They were rowing in an open boat-probably heavy laden, so that the waves started to crash over the sides-nearly swamping it-imagine the frantic baling out. Earlier, I was in Menorca with some friends in an inflatable dingy with an outboard motor sailing across a bay. It was choppy-there was little to hang on to-the spray came over us, so it was a trifle nerve wracking. I did think if the waves got any choppier, the ride could become very frightening indeed. This was the disciples’ situation-suddenly, it all seemed desperate. Things seemed out of control-possible drowning loomed, as the boat filled with water-it was the worst case scenario. No wonder panic set in.

4. They acted correctly & woke the Lord (v38), possibly, in a tone of reproach ‘Don’t you care, if we drown?’ Even a hint of resentment-He was asleep, while they were toiling away as rowers. I ask myself whether these hints of reproach do not colour my turning to the Lord when difficulties arise.

5. He helped at once-“got up, rebuked the wind & said to the waves’ Quiet, be still.’” (v 39 The calm that descended was complete-an amazing miracle!

6. The disciples were awestruck-terrified at His power. This was quite unlike what they expected of their Teacher-they were puzzled “who is this? Even the winds & the waves obey him?”(v 41) Instead of praise there was surprise & puzzlement. What had they learnt? When things get tough, they must to turn to Him-& their awe should encourage trust in His care for them.

7. What can we learn? As believers, life can chug along &, though obeying the Lord, we may be, almost, travelling on auto pilot. Suddenly, there is an unexpected turn of events-a situation may seem desperate-worst case scenarios, with endless ‘what ifs’, can flood, remorselessly, into our minds creating panic. If the difficulty is prolonged, the panic can persist & be harder to cope with. We should be honest with the Lord, if like the disciples, we are tempted to ask ‘do You care?’ Nonetheless, we’re doing the right thing in turning to Him &, like the disciples, find He does care, though not always in the way we had hoped or expected.

B. Jesus’ response. 1. Though He was asleep, He was with them. That can be true for us. We may not always feel his presence with us, but He has promised “Lo, I am with you always even to the end of time.”(Matt. 28: 20)

2. He brought help-they were taken out of the threatening situation. If we are not, He will enable us to survive. There’s great encouragement in Ps 138: 7a. ‘Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve my life.”

3. His two, almost, reproachful questions (v 40) are, firstly, “why are you so afraid?” Initially, fear is such a human response. It is linked to the thrust behind the second question “Do you still have no faith?” It’s a way of saying you still can’t trust Me or you still will not trust Me. Perhaps, they had not experienced His love & care for them enough in the past. I was reading a book about Sir Nicholas Winton that included reflections from some of the children he had saved. One girl, who, on arrival, had felt lonely, isolated & abandoned by her parents, had her life slowly transformed by her foster mother, whose first words were “You will be loved.” And so it proved for her, as the disciples found, so that they could come to the point of accepting “My grace is sufficient for you.”(2 Cor. 12: 9)

C. Recap of how this applies to us. 1. Forgetfulness. Their cry “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” sprang from forgetting that the Lord cared for them & cares for us, which is one of the main messages of our first reading, a) Ps 9. In verses 9 & 10, we read “the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed”-like the shelters on the Prom when it’s wet & windy! He is “a stronghold in times of trouble”-this implies a castle but could, also, suggest a clamp around us to stop us falling apart or disintegrating. You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.”

b) “Have mercy & lift me up from the gates of death” (v 13). You do not “ignore the cry of the afflicted.” (v 12) “But the needy will not always be forgotten nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.”(v18).

c). It is by his Justice that “the Lord is known.” (v16). He sees unjust things happening to us in the world & says “Vengeance is mine…I will repay.”(Rom. 12: 9). This reflects the comment ‘The mills of God grind slowly but they grind very small.’ There is, too, a hint of the Second coming when all wrongs will be put right. “Arise, oh Lord, let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence.”(v 19)

2. We should turn to him, because He cares.

3. Awe & praise. The disciples were awestruck by the power of the Lord Jesus-so should we be. Have we ever grasped the extraordinary care of the Creator of the whole Universe, who has numbered “even the very hairs of our head.” ?(Matt. 10: 30) Consequently, we should “declare your praise” & “rejoice in your salvation PS. 9 :14