Great story!

pretty short & succinct but Full of little eyewitness details like Jesus lying on a cushion! And can really sense the terror of the disciples can’t you as they face this storm?

Although some disciples were fishermen, Hebrews were generally landlubbers! ‘sea’ of galilee actually more like a large lake!

For Jews the ‘Sea’ represented forces of chaos – home of leviathan and other monsters of the deep! It was from the chaos of the waters that God brought forth the order of the land; Significant that in descriptions of heaven (Rev 21) there is ‘no more sea’.

So this freak storm, ‘furious squall’, blows up suddenly and Jesus is asleep, in the boat, on a cushion!

But the disciples are panicking. ‘Doesn’t he realise! Doesn’t he care?!’ How can he be so oblivious to our peril, in dire straits’. Panic panic.

So they wake him up and witness this man, their teacher, their rabbi, whom they’ve only recently begun to follow, speak to the wind and waves and still them with a word.

Jesus turns to his disciples *(spoken with no emotion)* ‘Why afraid? Do you still have no faith?’

I wonder *how* he said those words, I wonder at his tone of voice and facial expression… was this too a rebuke in the same way he spoke to the waves? is he exasperated, shaking his head at them? or is he compassionately encouraging them to believe? This is the difficulty of reading scripture. Open to subjective /personal interpretation based on views of who God is and what he’s like, which inevitably will be influenced by personal experiences of upbringing, and relationships with others.

In the past I’ve tended to hear rebuke and frustration from Jesus in these words, but the more I’ve spent time in prayer and contemplation, the more I’ve invested in my relationship with God, the more I’ve realised and come to experience his patient compassionate loving nature. I remember a few years back when stepping out to do something, in fear of disappointing God. I prayerfully uttered ‘I just want to please you!’ to which immediately I clearly sensed a reply ‘I am pleased!’ The words came like that unbidden into my mind. ‘I am pleased’!

It is God’s nature, the great ‘I am’, to be pleased with us. That’s his default. Yes, he gets angry – scripture is clear on that, angry at injustice, wilful disobedience and hypocrisy, but as scripture says ‘he is slow to anger and abounding in love’. He knows our hearts and our desires and our motivations he knows our strengths and weaknesses and he is rooting for us. he may need to be firm sometimes but always with compassionate love.

I suggest that here, Jesus speaks these words in a tone of compassion and encouragement – come on guys, believe in me! Don’t be afraid!

And indeed as result of Jesus’ calming command to the wind and waves the disciples are left awestruck, wondering. They’d seen Jesus rebuke spirits and demons and perform healing miracles but this is a step beyond! For Hebrews, only God can command the sea, whip up a storm or still the waves (Psalm 89, 65). So what does this say about this man, Jesus? They are slowly coming to a point of realisation of just who this man is, though it’s a few more chapters yet in Mark’s Gospel before Peter makes that significant statement in response to J’s question ‘who do you say I am?’ He acknowledges ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of God!’

I wonder too how Jesus’ could sleep in the face of this storm. Peacefully sleeping in the stern on a cushion. Demonstrates a deep assurance doesn’t it. Like he knows it will be ok, that this is not the end, we will not drown, it’s only a storm. Someone recently told me how they’d been struck by Jesus words in the initial instruction – let’s go over ..*to the other side!’* he’s not saying let’s go to the middle of the lake and drown! he says let’s go to the other side. There might be a storm on the way but we’re going to the other side, just hold on in there. Come rest on a cushion too! Don’t be afraid, have faith.

In this instance we see Jesus calm the storm in response to his disciples cries and by doing so reveals his power over the elements and the disciples begin to realise who this man is. but I get the sense *he* was prepared to ride it out.

And we know God doesn’t always stop the storm. When Paul caught in storm going to Rome, God didn’t still the waves then despite Paul being a man of great faith. But Paul had a deep assurance of God in the midst of it – he trusted that they would get to the other side! And they did, although the ship was broken up, everyone turfed into the water, they survived!

Last week Tom spoke about metaphors and similes, as he unpacked Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God.

Today Mark’s Gospel moves on to a new series of stories. This is the first of series of miracle stories all of which demonstrate Jesus’ power, revealing more of who he is.

But as well as being actual accounts of what happened, as with much of scripture we can uncover deeper truths as the stories can themselves be received and interpreted as metaphors.

The imagery of being at sea, of being buffeted by waves, and facing storms has deep theological resonance. Early apostolic fathers often referred to the church as a ship. Tom before now has explained to us the architecture of traditional church roof resembling a ship/ark. And you may remember Jesus telling the parable of the wise and foolish man and the respective resilience of their houses in the face of a storm, often interpreted as weathering the storms of life.

There are all sorts of storms that we may face in our lives – ill health, family break up, unemployment, depression, trauma, violence, debt, grief, list goes on.

2 Corinthians – Paul lists all sorts of storms of life that he’s had to endure, beatings, imprisonment, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger; but in the midst of them all he’s known God’s strength and provision.

Being a follower of Jesus does not necessarily prevent the storms happening. In fact, many of the troubles, hardships and distresses that Paul experienced were *because* he was a follower of Jesus. But it does mean we’re not alone in them. Jesus is riding the storm with us.

Jesus being with us in the storms of life probably isn’t new teaching for you. I doubt I’m telling you anything you didn’t already know. But if you’re anything like me you may need to hear it over and over again. We often need reminding don’t we, of God’s eternal comforting presence with us in the storms of life. And we need to learn how to remind ourselves!

When I first started teaching, it was in a city centre school in a really rough area of Portsmouth. For me it was a very long storm and I needed a daily reminder that jesus was in the boat with me. Who knows that kids song Be bold be strong? In some ways it’s naff, one of those 1980’s choruses that so many people were scathing about. But I tell you I would sing that song, that naff song, each day as I drove to school….([Be Bold Be Strong (Children's Songs With Actions) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9Bgxzk_P8w)). By singing, by declaring those words aloud in the car it encouraged me to remember the faithfulness of God, his presence with me and to trust him in the midst of this storm, relying wholly on him in those difficult days, not despairing, not panicking.

I’m not saying you have to learn kids songs though actually it’s not a bad idea for they often hold simple but important and powerful truths and are easily memorised! But how else can we remind ourselves of Jesus presence with us, to help us hold on as the storms rage about us? Some of you may have favourite hymns that bolster you. A family member recently told me how they picked up a sheet and found the words of the hymn ‘will your anchor hold in the storms of life’? really comforting when they were going through a rough time. Or maybe reciting words of the psalms – e.g. 121 I lift my eyes to the hills…. Worth learning off by heart! Or at least some key phrases.

And don’t wait for the storm to hit before you do so, for if you don’t have these reminders in place you’ll be floundering around, caught unawares. It’s good to be prepared.

Remind yourselves daily now of who God is, of his faithful presence with us, so that when a storm hits we can emulate Jesus in the boat, knowing a deep assurance and trusting him to help us to weather it.

*Finally a reflection on our current times…*

*At moment we’re in the midst of a worldwide storm of Covid-19,pandemic, though thankfully it seems to be abating somewhat, or not. Some have likened it to a storm upon the lake. We’re all experiencing the same storm, but we’re all in different boats, and some experiencing more drastic effects than others.*

*As Christians, one would expect that our experience of such a storm* with *faith is different than if we had* no *faith. Jesus is in the boat with us. We can be assured of his presence and know his peace whilst the winds and waves beat against the boat. Is that your experience?*

*But what about afterwards? I suggest there will be a lot of mopping up in the aftermath of this storm, and perhaps still other localised storms whipping up as the long term effects of the national lockdown emerge.*

*We’re being warned of a mental health crisis, with increased anxiety, including and perhaps especially amongst the very young. There’ll be unemployment, and consequent debt; effects of Domestic abuse and family break down; Those of us who have ridden this storm with Jesus will need to be prepared to reach out to others to minister and to witness to those in such need.*

 *I’ll explain one way in which you can support this ministry locally in the notices at the end of the service.*

*I’ll finish with a reminder of God’s help in the words of Psalm 46*

God is our refuge and strength,
    an ever-present help in trouble.
**2**Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
**3**though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

**4**There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,the holy place where the Most High dwells.
**5**God is within her, she will not fall;
    God will help her at break of day.
**6**Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
    he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

**7**The Lord Almighty is with us;
    the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**8**Come and see what the Lord has done,
    the desolations he has brought on the earth.
**9**He makes wars cease
    to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
    he burns the shields[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2046&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-14624d)] with fire.
**10**He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God;
    I will be exalted among the nations,
    I will be exalted in the earth.’

**11**The Lord Almighty is with us;
    the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
*Deep peace of the gentle night to you.*Deep peace of Christ to you.