

## Sermon 20.06.21

*2 Corinthians 6.1-13; Psalm 107.1-3,23-32; Mark 4.35-41*

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

One of the most well-known songs from the 1954 musical *Carousel* by Rodgers and Hammerstein is a song entitled “You’ll never walk alone”. It’s a song that would later be performed on a number of occasions, particularly at times of heartache and loss, to spread a sense of hope. In 1989, 96 football fans lost their lives during a game at Hillsborough Stadium during the FA Cup semi-final. After the Hillsborough Disaster, the song has been often performed to commemorate the lives of those who died that day. Most recently, the song was shared during the first lockdown to show a sense of gratitude towards healthcare workers.

As an avid fan of musicals, I first heard the song when I was personally facing a storm in my own life and the lyrics did leave me with a sense of hope and encouragement. When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high, And don't be afraid of the dark. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, And you'll never walk alone. During this personal storm, I also came across the passage from Mark’s gospel that we heard today. The passage communicates a sense of encouragement, but for me, also served and serves as a reality check. It is a stark reminder both of Jesus' authority, and his constant presence through all seasons of our lives.

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The reading begins in the evening, after Jesus has had a long day in the boat teaching the crowds and the disciples in parables. And so, just as one might do after a long day's work, Jesus is sleeping. Here, we see his humanity. But while he is sleeping, a storm hits boat. The skilled and experienced fishermen start to panic. Water is quickly flooding the boat, and no doubt they’re beginning to fear the worst. The disciples come rushing to Jesus. What Jesus does next is anything but human, rather it is a display and example of his divinity and authority over creation. He doesn’t get grumpy at them for waking him up, like I might have done. And he doesn’t just go back to sleep. Jesus performs a miracle. He rebukes the wind. He calms the storm.

We see examples of God rebuking the winds in the Old Testament. And so, when Jesus stills the raging seas, he is doing what only God has the authority and power to do. The passage indicates that Jesus is the Messiah. Only later will the disciple Peter come to realise that Jesus is the Messiah. And then, he will learn that to be the messiah means embracing suffering and death. It is because of Christ's humiliation, his death and resurrection that our sins will be forgiven and we may have life in Jesus' name. As the Carousel song reminds me, we never walk alone. Jesus is with us, even at times when we feel he is sleeping or not listening.

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Then comes what one might call the reality-check moment. After performing the miracle, Jesus asks the disciples two questions. *"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*. The term 'afraid' used here is a word that also translates as cowardly, faint-hearted or fear-driven. Jesus' question is an important one for us today. It encourages us to ask ourselves what it is that we are afraid of. In which areas of our lives are we being driven by fear? And are we letting God dwell in those areas? Sometimes fear of change, or fear of letting go of something, might discourage us from lifting our fears to God, or allowing him to dwell in every aspect of our lives. The Bible teaches us to not be afraid, to trust in him, and to lift everything to him in prayer. "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Jesus also asks the disciples *"Have you still no faith?"*. Faith, as the Bible Study has been discovering, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Martin Luther described faith as a living and unshakable confidence. It is believing and having hope in the living God. Jesus is the hope that, as the song says, we can hold in our hearts. The disciples' discussion afterwards about who Jesus is is proof that they don't yet fully know Jesus. But something is stirring in them. Their response to these two questions is that they are filled with awe, or fear as it is commonly translated. But this isn't the cowardly fear, the earthly fear that was mentioned earlier. This is a reverent type of fear. A fear that stems from a respect and appreciation of one who is great and worthy. We are all at different stages of our journey of faith. Some are only just beginning to discover and get to know the Lord, some might have known and had faith in Jesus for a long time. But each of us continues on a journey of faith.

Perhaps it's worth asking? Are our lives driven by this timid fear, or the reverent fear and awe of the Lord.

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So what does this passage mean for us today? This past year has been an especially challenging year for many. It may have caused us to doubt God and it may have challenged our faith. The pandemic has of course been a storm that has, in one way or another, affected us all. We are also becoming increasingly aware of the disastrous and devastating effects of climate change, not only on the environment, but also on people in poverty. Actual storms are becoming more frequent and extreme and are threatening and taking lives.

Sometimes, we can find ourselves drowning in the difficulties we face. There are glimpses of hope around us. Medical professionals working on and developing vaccines, teams and organisations fighting to combat the climate crisis and support those most heavily impacted. All of these are tiny little glimpses of the hope that are brought to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What the disciples didn't recognise at the time is that Jesus is the Messiah, he is the saviour. Jesus has the power to move mountains and to calm storms. And so it is to Jesus that we look to. He calls us, as his disciples, to have faith and to trust in him. We are called to look to the Lord in times of fear and distress, to hold on to hope and faith throughout all weathers and seasons thankful for the blessings that Lord God graciously pours upon us. It is through Jesus that we can walk on, with hope in our hearts, knowing and believing that we will never walk alone. As the psalm reminds us, the Lord is gracious, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Amen.