

Trinity 3 Zoom Sermon by Phil Baker

I have here a 17th C painting of Jesus and the disciples in the boat during the storm which is in today's gospel. Jesus looks incredibly bored as the disciples panic; the sail is in tatters and there are ropes trailing overboard. Water has great power. It has the power for life. It is a source of new life; it is an absolute essential for plant and animal life on our planet. We know only too well how fundamental shortages of water can cause immense human suffering in parts of the world such as Africa. It is an essential for our own survival. It also has the power to clean and ensure our good health. It is used in baptism as a sign of washing our sins away. But it has another power, a huge destructive power. The Jews had a dread of the sea. Most references to the sea in the bible instil a sense of fear; in the Creation story God conquers the sea so that it is parted, and dry land appears; indeed, we have heard God telling Job this morning that it was he who tamed the sea and gave it boundaries. It was parted for the Israelites and then closed in and drowned the Egyptian army; Jonah was swallowed by a large fish, and even St Paul was shipwrecked. The Talmud tells every Jewish father to teach his sons to swim and I read somewhere that the Hackney swimming baths are set aside every week so that the men and boys of the Stamford Hill Orthodox Jewish Community can use them for just that! This tradition is because of that dread. The sea is something that people have battled against since time began.

Today's readings are all about battles. God tells Job to gird his loins like a man, perhaps not a very PC sentence these days. But he is essentially telling him to get his act together and stop being a wimp! God tells him that he set the boundaries for the sea at creation; that all that happens in creation is his. God is challenging Job. St Paul tells the Corinthians that the servants of God have to fight through all sorts of calamities and hardships, that life is a battle. It suggests two parallel types of discipleship, on the one hand we suffer painful challenges which test our endurance to the limit, whilst we counter these sufferings with purity, knowledge, patience, kindness and a string of other virtues.

The disciples set off across the lake in the evening, taking Jesus with them, 'just as he was', no doubt very tired having been teaching and preaching all day. As they go they encounter one of those sudden and terrifying storms that the Sea of Galilee is known for. As the hot humid air rises up the Golan heights, there is an inversion and the colder air at the top comes rushing down across the sea whipping it up into a frenzy. They are quite understandably terrified in their small and unsophisticated boat; but Jesus carries on sleeping. The disciples expect him to save them, to calm the storm. When he wakes up he tells them off for having so little faith. And they still don't really know who Jesus is; they are filled with great awe and say to each other, '*who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?*'

We are in particularly stormy times at the present with Covid 9 (I hesitate to say the word yet again!), but we must not forget that there are various areas of conflict throughout the world and it has ever been thus. There are injustice and oppression, prejudice and hatred, starvation and disease in many parts of this planet. As Christians we are called to fight these things with the Christian qualities that Paul lists and, with that faith to which Jesus calls the disciples and us. Let us pray for the strength and faith that we need to fight the storms and help God's Kingdom come about on earth as it is in heaven.

AMEN