

### Trinity 3 Havant (2021) Proper 7 Yr B

***“Who is this that even the wind and sea obey him?”***

The Bible starts with a picture of chaos, described in Genesis as ***“without form and void”*** and as a great deep and terrifying mass of water. For all that our ancestors knew how essential water is for life, they were also very well aware of its destructive potential. After creating light, God’s first act was to tame this primeval watery chaos, to impose some order on it, to prevent it from overwhelming the earth. We should imagine God creating a protective dome to create a safe space. Most of the seething mass of water was outside the dome, kept at a safe distance, while God gathered together the water that was left inside the dome and restricted it to a particular place - the sea - and set limits to it so that dry land could appear. Nevertheless, the sea, dangerous in itself, remains a scary environment in which all sorts of horrors lurk.

We heard an echo of this image of creation in this morning’s first reading from the Book of Job: God ***“shut in the sea with doors, and prescribed bounds for it... and said ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’”***

Throughout the Bible the sea was a place at best avoided or at all events always to be treated with the greatest respect. The danger of the sea and the nasty things it might contain is a frequent theme. But along with it, the God who ordered it in the first place is the one who continues to offer protection and rescue when things go wrong. Just think about Noah and his ark, Jonah and the whale, and of course in this morning’s Gospel, Jesus and the great gale - remember that word “great” as we’ll come across it again later - the great gale which threatened to overwhelm the boat in which he and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee.

The way the story is told recalls another OT passage, from Psalm 107: *“[The gale raised] up the waves of the sea. Tossed up to heaven, then into the deep; their soul melted away in their distress. They staggered, reeled like drunken men, for all their skill was gone. Then they cried to the Lord in their need and he rescued them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, all the waves of the sea were hushed. They rejoiced because of the calm and he led them to the haven they desired.” (Ps 107)*

Imagine the turbulence and the noise of the **great** storm - and then notice how after Jesus had rebuked the wind and waves there was a **great** calm. (It is a pity that our translation of the Gospel describes it as a “*dead* calm”, concealing the fact that St Mark uses the word “great” again - a great gale reduced by Jesus to a **great** calm.)

No wonder the disciples were afraid; but Jesus doesn't reprove them for that but rather for their lack of faith.

This is not, you understand, a story about a wonder worker or magician with mysterious powers. This is doctrine! The disciples ask, “*Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?*” Jesus can control the chaos now, because he is himself the word through whom God tamed the chaos in the beginning. The unspoken message is of course that he was in control even when he appeared to be asleep. Do you believe this?

As Fr Tom loves to remind us, context is so important in understanding the scriptures. The context in which the gospels were written was one of growing persecution. Ever since the beginning, the ship of the Church has been threatened by apparently overwhelming storms, both those from without and those generated by the faithlessness of its own members. But Jesus is in control and will not let the ship of his church be overcome. That is as true today as it ever was.

That does not of course mean that his church in particular places and at particular times might not be overcome. Just remember that there was a time when what is now Turkey and what is now North Africa were among the heartlands of the faith. We should not be surprised by this. Whether by overt persecution, by easy accommodation with the powers-that-be, or by the subtle infiltration of contemporary culture, Christian faith is always under challenge. As a former Archbishop of Canterbury once warned, the Church here and now is only one generation away from extinction. But God is in charge. That is the message of today's gospel.

This is however only part of the story. The stilling of the storm happened while Jesus was still forming his community. If there is one thing about which the NT is perfectly clear it is that Jesus entrusted to his community a responsibility (and the power) to continue his work, and promised that “***the gates of hell would never prevail against it***”.

This is why St Paul could write in this morning's second reading that **"we work together with him"**. This is only one of many passages where he stresses the unity in will and action between Christians and God, and between Christians, in order to frustrate the forces of chaos: **"through Christ God reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."** We can hardly be the ambassadors for Christ we are expected to be if we are divided among ourselves. That is why our fellowship - our communion - in the Church is so important.

According to the Bible, Christianity is a social matter: we are saved into a community and in that community we are called to work together with God and each other. Don't worry; this is not the beginning of another sermon on a different subject but just a short conclusion about the part we are called to play in the ordering of creation and the proclamation of the **"great calm"**. If we are the Body of Christ and each of us limbs or members of it, it doesn't matter whether we are thinking big about the unity of the world wide Church - something that has occupied a large part of my life - or more locally about cooperation between congregations in the same area - like the proposals I understand are being discussed between this parish and St Alban's - or even how we relate to each other both in St Faith's and with our Christian neighbours of other denominations. It's all the same thing. It is indeed a chaotic world out there, and in order to play our part in that great story of establishing order and restoring calm we must be eager, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians **"to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."**