

Second Sunday Before Lent 2025 - Year C (23 February)

Luke 8.22–25

A Sermon by the Rev. Jackie Bullen

This gospel reading is a concise account by Luke of Jesus stilling the storm when compared to the accounts in the Gospels according to St Mark and St Matthew. If you have time, I recommend you read all of these to see the similarities and the differences. It is a useful exercise.

The place of the story in Luke's gospel follows Jesus' parable about parables, the parable of the sower scattering the seed on four different kinds of ground, together with its interpretation and it is followed by the deliverance of the man possessed by 'Legion', and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood with the raising of Jairus' daughter.

Despite Luke's characteristic brevity in describing the events, he actually brings out a number of things of significance in telling this story.

First, at every opportunity he emphasises the seriousness of the storm and the situation of the disciples. This is in no way played down. In life most people will experience serious and difficult issues. Times of danger, physical, mental or spiritual. Times when we are seriously afraid. Rather than simply describing the danger, Luke names it, and almost gives a sense of the intent of the storm in destroying the boat by mentioning the 'wind and the raging waves' in v 24. Interestingly, this is also the term used in the Letter of James, chapter 1, verse 6, as a metaphor for doubts that can undermine faith.

St Luke leaves us in no doubt that the threat to the disciples is real. They woke Jesus with shouts of 'We are perishing'. The disciples were afraid for their lives. He depicts not merely a storm on the lake, but a determined and real attack on Jesus and the disciples. The gale does not merely exist, it sweeps down on them. However, Jesus not only 'rebukes' the wind, but in the account of the disciples he 'commands' the winds and the water and they obey him.

Here we have a pattern which we see in this and other gospel accounts of Jesus words and actions.

Jesus takes his disciples to another place.

They go with him willingly but unsure of where this journey will lead them.

There is a dramatic turn of events which Jesus must face.

Jesus issues commands to the forces of chaos.

Peace is restored by Jesus' intervention.

The disciples are amazed at what they saw.

Depicting the raging sea as a metaphor for the forces of evil and chaos arises at three important points of the Old Testament narrative. Firstly, it is over the dark and chaotic deep that the Spirit of God hovers and brings order and light out of chaos and darkness. Secondly, this idea is revisited sometimes in reference to God's continuing acts in history as he rescues and protects his people (see for example Ps 74.12–18 and Ps 89.8–10 'Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You rule over the surging sea; when its wave mount up, you still them...'). Thirdly, in apocalyptic texts, the raging nations are depicted as stormy seas, out of which arise the beasts who defy the power of God (see Daniel 7). God's coming in judgement in the end times involves calming of those seas and ultimately eliminating them (Rev 21.1) so that, not only is evil dealt with, but the possibility of evil is itself done away with.

Jesus' calming of the sea is a demonstration of his divine power and a foreshadowing of the world to come. It becomes both a demonstration of his authority and power and the detail of Jesus asleep in the boat is an important element in Luke's portrayal of Jesus exercising his divine sovereignty over the forces of evil and chaos.

Jesus is appealed to as 'Master' by the disciples, a person of high status who is leader or commander over an organisation or one who leads and teaches others. Unique to Luke, it is the title given to Jesus by the disciples but it has a particular poignancy here. Jesus is not only the true commander of the boat, but the commander over the forces that threaten it. It is his word of rebuke and command that brings peace and order to the chaos and threat. Jesus is not simply manipulating the elements into a more favourable weather pattern; he is engaging with and naming destructive and threatening powers and demonstrating his authority over them.

The final theme, which Luke emphasises, is the response of the disciples. The setting and language here create a parallel with the earlier story in Luke with the miraculous catch of fish. Once again, the disciples are with Jesus in a boat on a lake; once again the disciples are unable to do what is required; once again Jesus demonstrates his power; once again he is addressed as 'Master'; and once again the disciples are overcome with awe.

It is striking that, though the disciples have woken him, Jesus more or less ignores their pleas and instead deals with the causes of their distress rather than their complaint itself. Once they see his authority, their response changes.

Jesus' companions in the boat react with fear; but their amazement, followed by their uncertainty about Jesus's identity, indicates that they do not, they cannot yet fathom what they have seen.

Those who have been called to be his disciples are now revealed to be clueless regarding the true identity of Jesus. He is sovereign over wind and sea; he is Lord over evil and chaos. The disciples' journey of faith started well enough, with a decisive break from their old lives and a commitment to follow Jesus but this episode tells us that their journey with Jesus has a long way to go.

The poor disciples who were afraid of the wind and the waves are now afraid because of who Jesus might be. They are astonished at his ability to still the sea and keep them safe. Placing our faith and trust in God can bring a peace that the world can't give. Maybe it won't be as dramatic as we hear in Luke's gospel, but the peace of Christ will always be bigger than the worst storm we can imagine.

Faith places all our troubles into a much greater story - a story where even in our darkest days, God's love will always bring us safely home.

Some questions we may ponder over the coming week.

Can we see ourselves in this scenario?

How do we as 21st century disciples react to danger, fear and dread?

Even though we call Jesus our Lord and Master, do we doubt his ability to still the storms of life?

Are we amazed when we call on Jesus for help and the storm is stilled?

Do we forget that he is in the boat with us? Amen