

## Sermon Ordinary Sunday 12 Year B 2024

The short and vivid gospel account placed before us today is one of immediate appeal. The evangelist Mark paints for us a dynamic scene. One, I am sure, we can imagine very clearly. It is a compelling, lively story. Now, as urban dwellers, the raw emotion behind the story is perhaps lost on us. Most of us don't live on the water or depend on it for our livelihood. And with safety equipment - lifeboats, safety vests, flares, satellite location devices, and the rest – much of the risk has been reduced. But there is no way of *removing* risk. Water remains dangerous. Stormy waters are more dangerous still. People *do* drown. The fear of the disciples is real and justified. Which makes Jesus' exercise of power over the elements even more noteworthy, even more remarkable.

Now, as with all gospels, a single, simple reading never exhausts the text. Many things are going on even in this simple story. But there is one key thing the evangelist is seeking to draw our attention to. That is, Jesus is one who has power over the natural order. The disciples ask an essential question at the end of the text: *who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.* We are meant to be able to answer. In the first-century Jewish mind the only possible response was obvious. It is the creator God – and him only – who has control over the forces of nature. Just as in the first chapter of Genesis God speaks his word of order over the chaos, so Jesus speaks a word of order over the chaos of the seas. In other words, this simple story is Mark's way of signaling Jesus' divinity. Jesus shares in the same divine power as the Creator.

So that is, if you like, the high claim this story seeks to make. It is a statement of Jesus' identity. An assertion about his true nature and power. But *we can* draw this story in much closer, without neglecting this assertion. This dynamic little story very easily lends itself to our personal lives. It is a story that directs us to invite Jesus into the storms of our life. It invites us to seek his word of calm, of peace, and of order.

If you are suffering grief, the passing of a loved one; if you are feeling the whirl of emotions following the death of someone close, then invite Jesus to come beside you and to calm the storm. If you are tormented by the storm of addiction, if things are out of control, if you sense forces about you and within you over which you feel powerless, then invite Jesus to come beside you and calm the storm. If you are struggling within your own body the difficulties of age and frailty, and a shrinking of your world; if you are battling poor health; or a medical diagnosis that has knocked you about, unsettled

you and left you wondering what's next, what lays ahead, then invite Jesus to come beside you and calm the storm. If there are difficult decisions to make; if you feel the pressures of work, of study, of family commitments, then invite Jesus to come beside you and calm the storm. If when you look out at the world around you, and you see wars and rumors of wars; if the international scene disquiets your heart, makes you anxious and agitated; if the future of the planet and the welfare of humankind concerns you; if you perceive the political scene to be unbalanced; if you are nervous at the future the men of power propose for us, then invite Jesus to come beside you and calm the storm.

It is a stormy, tempestuous world we inhabit. None of us gets through life unscathed! Globally and locally, personally and communally, there are things that threaten to swamp and overwhelm us. The good news of God in Jesus Christ is that *we do not have to confront these storms alone!* Now, human history shows us that the fixes and remedies we construct to deal with these things are at best temporary, and at worst dangerous and delusional. But God in Jesus offers us so much more.

But is it not a sure truth that so often human pride and human stubbornness *resists* inviting Jesus to come beside us amidst the storms of life? We think it better to struggle through it alone. We think we can manage. We think if we just strive more and try harder, we'll push through and come to the other side. Or we just shrug our shoulders and say, 'such is life', and settle for a life of isolation, misery, (grumpiness), and gloom.

And is this not just another example of how we compartmentalize our lives? The 'God bit' over here and the rest over there. Jesus can play a part in small areas of our lives. Sunday mornings, baptisms, weddings, funerals, Christmas and Easter and that's it. We don't want to give the impression of being too serious about it all! We don't want to conduct our lives as if it is really all true now do we? Because if we did believe it's all true, then we wouldn't exclude Jesus even from the dark, troubling, confronting parts of our lives. So often the response can be, 'Oh, I don't want to make a fuss. I don't want to bother. You're all too busy...' But these (to be frank) tend to serve as an excuse. An excuse for keeping Our Lord at arm's length, an excuse for excluding him.

Instead, though, when you're sick ask for us to pray for you and with you. Ask to be anointed. If there is a gnawing guilt, an unresolved burden from the past, go to confession! When you're dying, put things in place so you can receive the rites and

sacraments of the church. When you have important life decisions to make pray for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Open your Bible and seek direction. If you have a personal struggle, talk to someone in the church. Yes, the clergy, but also to a member of the wider church family. *Invite Jesus into the situation!* Sometimes that will require us to be humble, for us to acknowledge our need to others, to admit our pain, our vulnerability. For most of us, this is not easy. Most of us find it difficult to say, 'I need you, I need your support, I need your prayer. I need some guidance. I need your help.' In a healthy, mature church community that can occur. I hope that is the case here.

And this highlights another key aspect of today's gospel. And that is that the drama unfolds in *the boat*. In the gospel imagination, the boat is an important symbol, namely of the church. The waters, and in particular stormy waters, are a symbol of the world. What's more, of the chaos and malevolent forces in the world that seek to disturb and indeed swap us. The gospel today reminds us that the church - even if it is buffeted about - remains the place of safety, where the disciples gather, and importantly where *Jesus is to be found*. Jesus is in the boat with his disciples.

Inviting Jesus to come alongside us in the storms and turmoils of life requires of us trust. The gospel account today shows us that Jesus is trustworthy because he desires our good. But he also has true power. He speaks his word of calm over the elements of chaos, and they obey him. But the gospel account also reminds us where Our Lord can best be encountered, where the privileged place of his presence is. By his displays of power, we know him to be trustworthy and true. And so, we can trust him when he says the place of his abiding presence is the church. By his own word and promise it is in the community of disciples where his grace is most clearly channeled. We do not have to wonder where to find Christ. We do not have to concoct ways of making him known and encountering him. He has already provided the means!

If work or study or family commitments threaten to swamp you; if you face the prospect of illness, loss, and grief; if life decisions are challenging; if there are unresolved guilts gnawing at your heart; if the frightening prospect of change is rattling you; if the world around you appears to be spinning out of control, *then invite Jesus to come beside you*. Don't make the error of battling alone! Let him speak his word of calm to you. Trust his power. And seek him in the church. There you will find the guaranteed gift of his presence. And through the community of the faithful and the graces of the sacraments, we will find a sure help in time of need. Amen.