

Lord God, send us your Spirit so that as we hear the written word you may illuminate our hearts with the Living Word.

- On Friday, that day of extreme weather, when it rained and rained and rained all day, I walked up to the chemist to collect a prescription and then on to Tapps to get some garden canes. I was elegantly dressed in waterproof kagool top and trousers and some rather old sandals with no socks. As I squelched up the High Street, my head kept telling me I was in Cornwall and it took a couple of minutes to realise that the only time I wear that combination of sartorial clothing and head out into the rain is when we are on holiday there.
- Too often we inoculate ourselves from the weather outside by turning up the heating, or jumping on the car or ordering online instead of going outside.
- Jesus and his disciples experienced some weather in that boat on the Sea of Galilee. It must have been extreme because several of them were experienced fishermen and yet they were all terrified. Except Jesus. Who serenely slept through the weather until in desperation they wake him up and he calms the storm .
- This little passage, just 6 verses long, but endless in its imaginative appeal, comes immediately after the parables of the Kingdom we were looking at last week: the mustard seed and the farmer in his field. That is surely no accident in Mark's planning of his Gospel?
- What we've got here is a miracle of the Kingdom, demonstrating that the earth that we live on is part of God's Kingdom and Jesus has authority over it.
- And just as last week we could discern death and resurrection in the parables of the seeds as the 'dead' grain sprouted into new life – 'the farmer did not know how' - so this week we also have hints of death and resurrection as Christ is asleep on the pillow, 'dead to the world' we might say, and roused to life and action in order to control the chaotic storm. Why else does Mark bother mentioning that Jesus is asleep? If Jesus had not died, he would not have known what it was his disciples needed saving from.
- But whereas last week the emphasis seemed to be on encouraging us to look for death and resurrection moments, to look for sacrifice, in our own lives and to see the Kingdom of God through them, this week it seems to be a different object of death and resurrection. More of that later, but please bear in mind that if we wish to bring Christian truths to any situation we almost always need to speak about death and resurrection rather than merely being nice or being good.
- One more question. Where is the love in this passage? There loads of adventure. Lots of excitement, quite a lot of wonder and surprise, even after reading the passage for the umpteenth time. But is there love?
 - Well I think it depends what you mean by love.
- What the disciples wanted was a nice quiet crossing. One that allowed them to be in charge. To demonstrate their superior nautical skills to their landlubber Saviour. Finally they could do something for him. But Jesus did not give them what they wanted, almost at any level. He gave them what they needed. And that speaks of love to me. You can imagine them saying, "Good, he's gone to sleep. Now we can catch a few fish and he'll awake, refreshed, to breakfast on the other side before he has a hard day saving other people." But that imagined conversation, in the notoriously unpredictable Sea of Galilee quickly turned to "Help 'Teacher, do you not care that we are *perishing*?' And he proved his power by rising from the dead and taking control, saved them.
- He didn't give them a cuddly toy and the false impression that they were in control. He gave them life and a direction, a person, to follow. And which is the more powerful display of love?
- And which is the greater outcome? A nice breakfast with a BBQ cooked by the disciples on the shores of Lake Galilee? Or a shocked silence as *'they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*
- Beware! Because one is seductively attractive as we keep control and smell the BBQ and organise Jesus, enabling him to carry out his ministry to other people – not us – we don't need it of course. Whereas the other sharply brings home the point that we are not in control at all and it is only through the resurrection of Jesus that we are saved. But as we've just asked, 'Which of these shows the greater display of love?'

- And which of these is more realistic today? Are human beings in control in the world? Is Jesus sleeping? Are we in one of the 'Other boats' that 'were with him'? Is the water calm around your boat? Or unpredictable? Or stormy? Are you in control? Do you need to shout over to wake him up? Are you worried that you are not able to control it yourself? Are you wondering why he is not controlling the storm? Does he even care?
- Poor old Job in our first reading was metaphorically in a boat that had already sunk. He has spent 35 chapters bemoaning his lot. All his riches have been destroyed. All his family have been blighted. And he is covered with sores, sitting in the dust, looking foolish. Worse. The Jews at that time believed that wealth was a sign of being blessed by God. So Job was obviously being punished. But he'd always thought that he was a good man. So where was God. Why was he so deafeningly silent? Did he care??
- Job had been 'comforted' by his 'friends'. They clearly were his friends even if they were not offering him very good advice. They offered the advice of the times. Behave. Be good and God will bless you. Job doesn't understand. He can't think of any way he has sinned. He is suffering. He is in danger. Several times he says he wants to end it all. Sitting in the dust he is the subject of mockery and condescension .
- And then at the beginning of chapter 38, our reading this morning, God finally wakes up and begins talking. He answers 'Job out of the whirlwind' of Job's distress and basically seems to say, 'Who are you to challenge me?' 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.' There's sarcasm in his tone. 'Who determined its measurements – surely you know!' '
- What I get from all this is that God has created the heavens and the earth. God is in control. But he is not predictable or controllable. He understands creation completely, because he has created it and he loves it deeply as you only can love something if you have created it. But this love is not soppy or merely kind. This is a deep abiding love that passes through death and resurrection mirroring and surpassing the small deaths and resurrections that we experience in daily life and using those experiences to bring new understandings, new directions and salvation. These truths seem to be ingrained in the texts of the Old and New Testaments.
- We are not in control. Like the disciples in the storm, like Job in his troubles, like Jesus, we undergo deaths and resurrections in life. At the moment we are in the middle of some rather serious ones. The immediacy and life denying nature of the Corona virus. The ever present threat of climate change.
- The biblical stories assure us that God will not let the world perish. His love for it is too great for that. No, the bible promises again and again, not just in these two passages, that God will save the world. And he will save all humanity. Not to give them what they want, but instead what they need. And what we need is to live a simpler more sustainable life, where we don't cause untold harm to impoverished races on the other side of the world, where we don't cause global instability by destabilizing nations in our demand for cheap oil, where we don't poison the oceans in our disposal of microplastics, where we don't encourage ever growing populations to believe they can achieve whatever they want by hard work.
- The alternative is too ghastly to contemplate as society begins to disintegrate and the climate becomes ever more unstable.
- And in the midst of the storm we are left crying to Jesus to wake up and save us because we feel we are drowning. We would like Jesus to be a cuddly God of love and to arise, wave his magic wand, present us with a soft toy and wash away all the horrible bits of life like a bad dream, leaving us with a carefree existence and no worries for the future. To be able to jump into our diesel people carriers and drive with impunity. To buy our cheap goods off the internet without worrying how slaves have been involved in their manufacture or how much pollution has been pumped into the CO₂ filled atmosphere to produce them.
- But unfortunately, or fortunately, Jesus does not give us what we want. His love is much greater than that. He gives us what we need. And what we need; what humanity needs; what the world needs, is to live a more sustainable life. It's as if, in our boat near Jesus as the storm rages, instead of bailing water out of the boat we are scooping it in so the boat is sinking lower and lower in the water as the waves get higher and higher.
- And as we shout 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?', he sits up, stretches and calls out, 'Stop scooping water into your boat. Peace! Be still!' ... Are you going to listen?