

Muzzling the Storm – Mark 4 v35-41

OT Reading – Psalm 107 v23-29 - This is part of a litany of different ways and occasions in which God has shown his power in times of trouble to save his people. Here God calms the storm and the waves.

Intro – Feeling fearful

Today's miracle is the one Jesus did for the disciples, calming the storm. For this we need to get a bit into the emotions that the disciples may have felt – so we are going to do a bit of role-play in our minds – OK you up for that?

Imagine you are out shopping (Ladies you're on a proper shopping session - you with me so far – Men you've popped down the DIY shop) and you're in a familiar side street, one with a dead end. You come out of your shop and notice a rather vicious looking dog tied up outside a pet store nearby, it sees you and barks. Before you can walk past it, the dog is straining at his leash, works his way free and jumps out towards you snapping furiously and forcing you backwards to the end of the alley. You can't run for it, or he'll bite you. The dog stands there snarling and barking at you. No-one else is around. How do you feel? Are you getting frightened. You have nothing to defend yourself with and are just wearing summer clothes. He looks like he's about to tear into you any second. Now how do you feel? If only some-one could help. Then out from the nearby pet shop with a carrier bag comes a small girl, she looks only 9 or 10 year old. What do you do now – do you call her over and put her in danger. You try to say calmly 'I think I need some help from some-one – I'm about to get ripped to shreds', hoping she'll get some-one else, but she walks right over to the dog, whose barking and snapping ever closer. The small girl walks right up to the dog, and in a very firm voice, says 'Champ– Quiet'. She takes out from her bag, a new dog muzzle, and calmly puts it over the dog's mouth which he lets her do without resistance, then she pats his head, and he nuzzles into her chest. It all goes quiet. Now how do you feel? She then looks at you annoyed and says – he wouldn't have hurt you, he's just a bit playful, then walks off with the dog trotting behind her. You stood there in a clam street thinking – Um what just happened?

Fear of the Sea

Robert Louis Stephenson said - Keep your fear to yourself and share your courage with others.

Fear – it seems there is always something to be fearful of. Spiders, the dark, heights, electric bills, tax returns, getting old. The fear of dogs, which a friend had, can be very debilitating.

In Jesus' time there, some people feared the sea. In Old Testament tradition the sea was associated with evil powers. In Daniel's book evil monsters exist in the sea. In creation when God separated out land from sea it was believed that he had to combat monstrous forces of chaos that lived in or were identified with the sea. Rahab was one of the names given to a sea-monster that embodied this chaos with which God will battle. This imagery was brought out in Old Testament texts including the Psalms. There was also a belief in two hells, a fiery one and a watery one. So the sea being traditionally linked to evil powers, could be a source of fear.

In Luke 8, this miracle is coupled with the story of when Jesus drove demons out of a possessed man, and sent them into pigs, they rushed off a cliff into the sea. i.e This would have been interpreted as Demons going back to the watery hell where they belong.

Fear – it seems there is always something to be fearful of.

Describe the miracle..

Context with other miracles

Jesus was being seen by his followers as the long awaited saviour of their people, but what sort of Saviour was he? The resurrection of the only son of the Widows at Nain, was the sign that he was a great prophet like Elijah, who performed almost an identical miracle. Other miracles he did would have been a sign to the people of Jesus being a political leader like Moses, or a warrior leader like Joshua (noting that Jesus is another form of the name Joshua). In fact Jesus was not the only person doing miracles in that place at that time. The historian Josephus who reports on Jesus also mentions two other men that were called miracle workers— Haninah Ben Dosa and Honi the Circle Drawer.

Even today, it is big business to re-enact the miracles of Jesus. My favourite one is by Chris Angel has he walk bear foot across a swimming pool, with others in the pool, one even swims beneath him, and he gets to the other side. A very impressive illusion, check it out on you-tube. For 6 years I wondered how he did it, and last week I found out. Bright lights, camera angles, sea through plastic platforms, and actors on the video. Of course it is all an illusion - there is no real magic in any of it – bending spoons the lot.

But the miracle we are looking at today, had not been done by anyone else in the bible, no other miracle workers in those days. There is no magician or illusionist as far as I know has ever attempted to recreate this one. Go out onto the sea in a gail force storm, and stop it by telling it to shut up.

Not only is this unique, but it sent out a unique message to the disciples, about who Jesus was.

The setting

Lake Galilee is a big lake at 64 square miles it is the size of 11 Lake Windemere (our biggest English lake at 5.7 sq miles). It is often called the sea of Galilee because it has shores and tides and you can't normally see the other side! It is situated 700 feet below sea level and adjacent to a mountain region on the east . The valleys in these mountains provide channels for cold air to sweep down and whip up the storm, especially on winter evenings. Lake Galilee is known for these sudden violent storms . Nowadays they are known by the fishermen – as Sharkia – Arabic for Shark. Its OK if you stick close to the shore, but beware if you try and cross the lake when a Sharkia is on its way.

So (Luke 8 v22), Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples and said let us go across to the other side of the lake ! Not lets go fishing, or lets go to Genessaret, just – cross the lake. No-one seems to have asked him why ! It was a fair journey for a fishing boat, certainly plenty of time to hunker down in the stern on some coils of rope for a decent kip. One suspects that Jesus may have stage managed this miracle, he may well have knew a Sharkia was coming .Either way, he certainly wasn't worried about it, and soon dozed off.

The miracle

Out in the middle of Galilee, the Sharkia attacks, and one hell of a storm boils up. The Jews weren't a seafaring people – they left that to the Phoenicians north of Israel. Possibly because so many were fearful of this sea. But on this boat are seasoned boatmen, Peter & Andrew were experienced fishermen. Others too may have skippered boats through bad waters. James & John were sons of the fishermen Zebedee and were no doubt reasonable seamen themselves. A rough sea was no new experience to them, but this sounds like it was the worst they had seen. The boat was filling with water. It was so bad that they feared for their lives. Lieing proably on some coiled ropes with a make-shift pillow just up from the sloshing decks, and huddled in the stern, sleeping through it all was Jesus. It had been a long day teaching parables like the one about the Sower, and he was done for.

What happens next? The disciples woke up Jesus? Why – what were they expecting him to do? He was a carpenter and joiner not a seamen. If you want a new door frame, then its Jesus every-time, but piloting the boat safely through a Sharkia attack, its got to be Peter or Andrew who take the lead. So why did they wake Jesus? It probably just annoyed them, that he was unaware of the danger they were in. “Looks – he's soaking wet and he's STILL asleep – for goodness sake wake him up then.” It wasn't a gentle waking –

Oye – Jesus – don't you care we're about to die.

Ok – so back to your role play. You're trapped by the dog, you see the little girl come out of a shop with her carrier bag. You don't expect her to save you, but you certainly want her to see that you're in a bad way. There might be something she can do, although you don't know what.

I think it was like that for the disciples. Come on Jesus at least be aware of the trouble we're in even if you can't do anything.

He didn't address the disciples, he addressed the storm. Be quiet.

In fact the greek verb used for admonishing the storm is a weird one- literally translated it is - be muzzled. It is the same verb used in an earlier story where Jesus is preaching at Capernaum synagogue and in walks a possessed man and starts shouting 'What do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth – are you hear to destroy us – you are Gods holy messenger' – Jesus ordered the evil spirit to be muzzled and come out of the man.

What it meant to the disciples

If the disciples did hold with the Psalmists view of the sea and believed that the sea storms were caused by an evil sea monster (sometimes called Rahab) from the watery hell, then Jesus was showing he was in control of it. He was muzzling this force of nature. Its not the miracle itself, but what it meant to the disciples that is important. It's a sign of who Jesus is. So who is he?

Our Old Testamant reading from Psalm 107 recalls merchants out on the ocean and embroiled in a terrible storm.

"They cried out to the Lord God in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, the waves of the sea were hushed'.

The disciples would have been very familiar with this Psalm. There was something they knew all too well, only God can control the sea. This miracle was not a sign that Jesus was a great Prophet like Elijah, a political leader like Moses, or a warrior leader like Joshua, this had one clear message – Jesus was acting like God. Only God can do what he has done. They were in a boat with God, or at least the personification of God.

Is it any wonder that the passage goes on to say that the disciples were full of fear. Not about the storm now, but about the one who had just muzzled it. Woah – what just happened here? What sort of saviour is this we have in our boat that even the wind and the waves obey him.

This miracles was a sign to the disciples that he was the Son of God. If he had not been asleep in the boat, or perhaps pretending to be asleep. What would have happened. The first sign of high waves and Jesus looks over the edge and says – you guys can calm down, and they do. Thaddeus looks round and says – OK the winds dropped off. No impact. Jesus' timing was pefect to maximise his message. This was a sign to them – in bold capitals – I am the Son of God.

It gave them confidence to keep following and ultimately die for him. You wouldn't die for David Blaine or Honi the Circle Drawer.

What it means to us.

This parable is not telling me – that he will protect me from all the storms. That's a wrong interpretation. James :- 'Trials & temptations'.

It is telling me that Jesus is the son of God, so if I believe I have the spirit of Jesus in us, then the possibilities are endless.

I want Jesus in my boat. I don't want to face the storms without him, not because he is going to necessarily stop them all but he will help me overcome my fears, and give me the peace or the encouragement I need to cope with the Sharkias of life. (serious illness, sour relationships, persecution, job or financial hardships) . **[He calms us not the storm!]** . So we can be confident, and rest in the assurance that we aren't going to have to go through the dark valley alone. Don't you love Psalm 23 – but I also recommend that you read the first few verses of **Isaiah 43** when you're in the middle of "stuff".

**Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty,
you will not drown.**

He's promised he'll never leave us or forsake us if we trust him. He doesn't always bring peace to the circumstances – but he has promised peace deep within us. And if we understand that truth – if we get it- we can be spared some major disappointments in the Christian life. He is always there, even if we can't see him.

This parable tells us Jesus does have the power of God, and we will do well to have him with us, through lifes journey – whether we are in calm seas or rough seas. Amen

[James 1:2-4](#)

[*Faith and Wisdom*] My friends, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of **trials** come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such **trials**, the result is the ability to endure. Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing

I finish with my favourite quote from the late great Smith Wigglesworth

Great faith is the product of great fights.
Great testimonies are the outcome of great tests.
Great triumphs come only out of great trials.
Every stumbling block must become a stepping stone and
Every opposition must become an opportunity.

When the trials, don't forget those in there with you.