

Sunday 23rd February 2024; Benefice Holy Communion,
Ampleforth

Do you have heroes? People who you admire and praise for the heroics who we might like to be or have been! Throughout history, perhaps the greatest heroes have been those who've had the greatest challenges to overcome. But it is interesting that while everyone wants to be someone who can overcome, we're tend to have problems when we're given something to overcome.

We often refer to these challenges as "storms". Perhaps you're facing a storm today? Not "a furious squall," as in the Gospel, but rather a difficult situation with a manager, a spouse, child, or even someone in the church. Or maybe you're struggling against storm winds in your physical or mental health or emotions, or your sense of faith.

We are told the storm on the Sea of Galilee that day was so fierce that the boat was filling with water and in danger of being swamped, and the terrified disciples thought they were going to drown. Similarly, the storms of life often seem to pop up when you least expect them and when you're in the middle of a storm that seems like it's about to sink you. When this happens is your first reaction the same as the disciples on the Sea of Galilee that day: fear! Yet God's message to you in this story—and throughout the pages of Scripture—is to fear not!

This is illustrated in this story by some key headings. Firstly, have confidence in Jesus. The story begins with Jesus saying, "*Let us go over to the other side of the lake*". If the disciples had been paying attention, they would have noticed Jesus' resolve to bring them over, not letting them go under! He has the same plan for us today and every day. He doesn't say we will drown you on the way to your destination, He says you will arrive there. So no matter how scary the storm that comes along may seem,

you can be confident He will bring you safely to “*the other side.*”

Secondly, pray and ask for Jesus to be there with you. In the other Gospel account, we are told that “*there were also other boats with him*” but Jesus was only in the one boat, but other boats were following along nearby. This is indicative of people who attend church or other religious events to get in the *vicinity* of Christ, yet they’ve never really asked Him into *their own* boat. Until a storm hits, they probably feel safe enough, but that storm may reveal how dangerous it is to *assume* Jesus is in your boat, when you haven’t asked Him because when you’re going through rough waters, you don’t just want your Saviour outside your boat—you desperately need Him with you on the *inside*.

Thirdly, don’t doubt. Seeing Jesus asleep amid the storm, the disciples reacted the same way we would. Waking Him up, they questioned His love for them: “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*” We have probably all wondered the same thing at times: “Lord, if You *really* loved us, you wouldn’t allow us to go through storms like this!” Instead of doubting His love while we’re experiencing a storm, we should allow Him to show Himself strong and faithful in the storm.

Fourthly, be patient and steadfast. When Jesus says He will get you to the other side of the lake, He means it. But being in transition is difficult, and sometimes the journey lasts quite a bit longer than we would like. At times it can even be tempting to *go back* to the shore we came from instead of continuing *forward* to the other side. However, we must not lose heart when we’re halfway there.

Finally, have faith. After Jesus calmed the storm, He asked His disciples, “*Where is your faith?*”. Although the disciples had to wake Jesus in this story, that’s not the

message for us, for Jesus certainly isn't asleep today. Instead, it's *our faith* in Him that must be awakened. A favourite contemporary song of mine is called "Praise you in the storm" within which are the words, "I will praise you in the storm for you are who you are, no matter where I am, even though my heart is torn." God loves us and what the best for us to grow into the people He made us to be, so we need to remember that perhaps the storm we are going through is God's way of enabling us to grow in faith and bring blessing to others.

The point of today's Gospel is that a 'storm' that comes along in our lives can be our friend rather than our enemy, because it causes our faith to be awakened and trust in God's never-changing love for us rekindled and in doing so we can always be assured of the presence of Jesus with us in any passing storm. Thanks be to God. Amen.