

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – February 15th 2009

Mark 4:35-41 Terrifying Power

Jesus had no sooner finished one sermon than He, like all preachers, was thinking about the next one. He tells his disciples to cross to the other side of Lake Galilee and they set off in a little flotilla of boats, with Jesus asleep in the stern, as He was tired after reaching all day.

Galilee may look like a placid lake, but its position and the climate mean that the weather can be very changeable. A storm comes up very suddenly and the waves are so high that the disciples are very frightened. But Jesus is asleep. How is that possible? – Because He is in the centre of God's will. The disciples are stressed and exasperated with Jesus. He gets up, and talks quietly and with authority, and immediately the storm abates.

This is just like in the next episode in Mark's gospel where Jesus encounters the internal storm of the demoniac, wandering around the places of the dead. Jesus commands the spirits and they leave. Next time we see him, the man is dressed and in his right mind.

We rationalise these miracles, saying that the calming of the storm coincided with a change in the weather, or we psychologise it, saying that Jesus is stilling the storms of our lives; but Jesus with a simple word, brought peace. The disciples' reaction was to be even more terrified, because the only person who can do this is God. Who is this that exercises authority and saves people from the clutches of death? Is he a madman, a charlatan, a demon, a prophet or a pale Galilean? Or is He Jesus, the Son of God? Indeed a little later on, in Caesarea Philippi Peter will 'get it', when he acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of the Living God.

In the meantime the disciples are left terrified. For some reason we are better able to handle our own mortality than we are able to handle the presence of God amongst us; we are more at home with natural disasters than we are in the supernatural; more familiar with living with doubt and fear than we are with living by faith. In fact 'Doubt' is our middle name; look at how we speak of the current credit crunch, or the decline of the Church. But God is not caught out by these things!

Ian then used a long quotation from 'The Silver Chair' by C S Lewis.

We are familiar with doubt, fear and anxiety. But what about faith and trust? Mark is telling us not to be unbelieving believers. The storms of life will come, but Jesus is in the boat, so you can rest easy. He has the authority to keep our lives. We can be different as Christians in this current storm in our national life.

Jesus is so concerned about the rescue of one man that he is willing to let 2000 pigs go to their death over a cliff. He loves you, and desires to bring peace to you, internally, and externally (remember Mark writes this gospel to the persecuted Christians in Rome at the time of Nero). It is easy to think that God is asleep. But he has not forgotten us; not even a seismic wave can swamp us. He is in charge, with a word.

The demoniac is charged to go and tell his family what has happened, which is strange, as normally Jesus tells people to keep silent about what has happened. The people only want to banish Jesus from their town, but Jesus is always present in the message of the gospel proclaimed by His followers.

Come to submit, trust and believe in Him. Proclaim the unique, incomparable Jesus who has authority.