

It was a dark and stormy night

(Mark 4:35 – 41)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Passage: Mark 4: 35 – 41

Snoopy the dog from the Peanuts comic strip, is ready to begin writing his great novel. He opens up his typewriter and begins to write. "**It was a dark and stormy night**". Suddenly a shot rang out. A door slammed. The maid screamed. Suddenly a pirate ship appeared on the horizon. While millions of people were starving the king lived in luxury. Meanwhile, on a small farm a boy was growing up. End of Part One." Charles Schulz, creator of Peanuts gave Snoopy that hackneyed phrase, "It was a dark and stormy night," to begin his novel. What he has given us, with apologies to Snoopy, is an excellent example of what the great novel was never meant to be.

But, it was indeed "**a dark and stormy night**" in the scene from today's Gospel. Evening had come; Jesus and his disciples were out on the Lake Galilee. A huge windstorm arose and the waves flooded the boat. Lake Galilee is fairly small about 20 kms long and 10 kms wide. It is below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains. It is said that the west winds can rush over the peak; and in a funnel like effect, make the waters choppy and very rough with little warning.

Such a storm blew up as Jesus and his disciples were crossing the lake. It looked as though the boat was going to be swamped, so the sailors woke up the carpenter and cried out for help. Jesus sleeping in the stern, was exhausted after healing the sick and the blind and the demon possessed. He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to these, "**Peace! Be still!**" There was a dead calm then he asked them "**Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?**" His disciples were filled with amazement and asked one another, "*Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?*"

This miracle points to something deeper than the calming of one particular storm. Where Jesus is, the storms of life become calm. We have our storm and they come fast and I'm not talking about cold fronts, etc. Our storms are the phone calls in the night telling us of a family member who has been involved in a car accident. They may come as a crisis in our home where a marriage is ready to break up. Or one of the children suddenly becomes very ill and we have to call the ambulance or our storms are the harsh words between parents and children. Or they are the diagnosis of a terminal illness.

If it is true that '*in Jesus there is calm*'; does that mean that all you have to do is to call on Jesus, and all your troubles will disappear? Some people expect this. They consider God to be some sort of miracle pill – take this, close your eyes, and you will suddenly get well. That would be nice, but all too often we open our eyes and the troubles are still there. The clue to understanding 'calm', lies in the questions of Jesus, "**Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?**" The problem is not so much with the big storm but the lack of faith.

Do not look at the storm, but look at Jesus. "**Why are you afraid?**"; asks Jesus. Why do I get butterflies in my stomach? Why do I develop a sudden dry throat and sweaty palms? Why do I feel sick inside? The symptoms of FEAR can be triggered by many things. Some people are afraid of heights; some dread getting on an aeroplane; others fear meeting new people, and some have a deathly fear of getting up in front of large group and making a speech. Some people scream or run away at the sight of a spider, a mouse, or a snake. Alfred Hitchcock had an uncanny sense of knowing how to play on our fears in a movie like 'The Birds.' Fears may be real or imagined, but they are always real to the person experiencing them. Fred dreads going to the dentist. Mrs Jones put an additional dead lock on her front door, after her neighbour's house was burgled.

The word and promise of God help us to deal with our fears. Believers through the ages have taken courage and comfort in words like these; "The lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" The best known Psalm of all offers this reassurance: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; your rod and your staff – they comfort me."

The Lord offers this promise; "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name; you are mine when you pass through the waters; I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."

Jesus' birth was announced with this reassurance to the shepherds: "Do not be afraid; I am bringing good news of great joy for all the people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the lord!" The Good Shepherd also has a word of assurance for his precious sheep: "Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

It was a dark and stormy night. If your understanding of Jesus is small and ineffective then your faith will be small and ineffective; the nights will seem even darker and stormier. If you believe in a Jesus who died for all your sins then rose victoriously as your Saviour if you believe in a Jesus who lives and rules eternally and has complete power over nature; if you believe in a Jesus who promises you eternal life with him; then you will want to than praise; and serve him every day. He is your lord! He is your Saviour! He is your Friend!

He is the very Son of God. As our vision of him increases, so does our faith and trust in him!

In Jesus there is calm. **With** Jesus there is courage. **Under** Jesus there is confidence. Trust in him at all times. Worship him every day and especially on Sundays. **Amen.**

May the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Graham Zweck, 20 June 2021