

# Homily for people and parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024, Pentecost 5

Readings: **1Samuel 17:57 – 18:5, 10-16**  
2Corinthians 6:1-13

**Psalm 133**  
**Mark 4:35-41**

I wonder how you are going this week? Do you have a sense that you are flourishing in life, or that you are floundering? And... if you feel like you are floundering, I wonder what would need to change so that you could flourish?

In considering these questions, I think one of the ways we can gain new insight and guidance is through reading the Bible and each time we worship with a congregation, or in a small group, we hear at least one Bible reading.

Is it unreasonable to have an expectation that in God's grace, there will be something, in at least one of the Bible readings this morning, that will resonate in some way? There may be wisdom that gives comfort, or something that gives challenging insight! After reading or hearing that text we can helpfully ask ourselves what God might be saying to us, and what might we do in response?

In congregational worship there may be a particular verse from the Psalm, or the phrasing of words in a hymn. There may be a gift from the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, or wisdom from one of Paul's letters. My 'go to' space of encounter is very often the Gospel reading, and I think it's because the Gospels describe Jesus interacting with everyday people like you and me.

The reading from Mark's Gospel this week remembers Jesus travelling with his friends across the Sea of Galilee. It's not hard to imagine – a group of friends travelling from one place to another in a boat. Jesus was exhausted after a busy time of ministry and had fallen asleep on some cushions. A storm developed and, even though many of the disciples were fishermen, the waves started to swamp the boat.

I imagine them desperately bailing water, taking down the sails, and using rudder and oars to keep the prow facing towards the waves. I imagine the wind howling, and a growing sense of desperation. Every pair of hands would have been needed, so they woke Jesus but, after opening his eyes, he did not join the bailing team. Instead, he commanded the wind and the waves to be still... and immediately the wind dropped away, and the sea became calm.

Please picture with me the disciples standing in the boat holding buckets, ropes, and rudder... astonished at what had just happened. Their clothes soaking wet, their bodies full of adrenaline, and their minds struggling to comprehend what they had just witnessed.

Those who were fishermen well understood the life-threatening potential of severe storms... so, what in the world had just happened?

Turning to them Jesus asked why they had been afraid, and why they still had no faith. They, in turn, were uncomfortable and filled with awe... and, why wouldn't they be? The Scripture tells us that they then asked each other, *'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'* (Mark 4:41)

Let's begin by thinking of the boat as a metaphor for your life and mine. Do we have a sense that our sails are full, the sun is shining, and that we are travelling where we want to go? Or, do we have a sense that there is no wind, that we are going nowhere, and are, in some way, stranded between one place and another? Is the sea we currently travel on a bit choppy and uncomfortable? Or, worse, do we have a sense that we are in the midst of a storm, and the waves are swamping our boat while the Jesus we love appears to be asleep and unconcerned?

'Why are you afraid? and, Have you no faith?' Jesus asked his disciples!

I am not suggesting that in the midst of life's storms all we have to do is wake Jesus up and we'll get the result we hope for! That would not be true to our lived experience of faith. Sometimes we get the result we hope for, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes the loved person recovers from serious disease or accident, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes there is reconciliation in a relationship, and sometimes there is none. Sometimes justice prevails, and sometimes it is unrelentingly denied. In some circumstances we may even feel that our boat has actually sunk, and we are left clinging to the wreckage!

In a broader context, we might think of the boat as a metaphor for our congregation or Parish, for our local community and even Australian society. In our global village and interconnected global economy we might even ask how the boat of the world is going! At each level: are the sails full, the sun shining, and are we travelling well? Or, are there storms that threaten and overwhelm?

In an ABC article last week, it was reported that Birmingham City Council, the governing body of Britain's second largest city, declared itself bankrupt last September. To save money the city will dim and switch off street lighting each night and collect rubbish fortnightly rather than weekly. Twenty-five of the city's libraries will be closed and funding to arts and culture sector will be cut by 100%. It is apparently very hard to access a GP, or any form of community service. The courts are overwhelmed, and the prisons are dangerously full.

I grew up in the UK and studied near Birmingham. It seems unbelievable that this great city is in such dire straits. I forwarded the article to my brother, Tim, who lives in Wales – the

land of green valleys, male voice choirs, and rugby – to see what his thoughts were. He assured me that the problems were not limited to Birmingham and that these are very tough times for many communities in the UK. However, he also said that, *“there’s good stuff happening all over the place which doesn’t make the news as they can’t get the word ‘crisis’ into a sensationalised headline...”*

*‘There’s good stuff happening everywhere...’* is, I think, helpful wisdom for us. ‘Good stuff’ in our lives, in our congregations and parishes, in our society, and in the world. This does not deny the terrible stuff – the unjust stuff – the awful stuff – the overwhelming stuff... but it is a reminder that all is not lost. That there can be light in the midst of darkness, there can be love, there can be hope, there can be peace, and there can even be... moments of joy!

It is important to remember Jesus was on the boat with his disciples and was not far away. Similarly, in our lives, and in the life of the world... Jesus is with us and is not far away. Helpful to remember that in the same way Jesus did not respond to the storm in the way his disciples expected, so God may not respond to our various storms in the way that we hoped. For, Jesus did not bail out the boat or wail in anguish, but with quiet authority, brought peace and calm. Then he reminded the disciples they need not be afraid, and that they should have faith.

I think it is comforting to be reminded that God is with us in the boat and that whatever storms are going on around and within, Jesus can bring peace and calm.

If you, your family, your parish, or your local community currently has a sense of storm – and they may be large or small - I pray that God grant you peace and calm and inspire within you creative ways forward.

Would you please join me as I close in prayer:

Holy God we give thanks for the gift of our lives, and for your love. We give thanks for being with us in times of plenty, and in times of struggle. Through your Spirit strengthen our faith that, no matter our circumstance, we can know your peace. We pray in the name of the One who calmed the storm, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen