**Morning Praise @ Home 23rd June 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading Mark 4: 35 – 41

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**Reflection from Sue**

***Trusting Jesus as Lord***

Many of us are in church today because we believe in the Christian narrative – that Jesus, the Son of God, having entered human existence, then having defeated death through his Resurrection, is now enthroned in Heaven. So we come to an event as described in our passage without any real surprise that Jesus could control the natural world.

But I want us to forget what we know for a moment and enter into the experience of the disciples, who hadn’t yet seen Christ’s ultimate triumph. What they knew was Jesus the human, who, crowded by folk after a series of healings, needs a chance to rest, to escape the immediate context, to have some secluded time – like that moment when, after a tiring drive, the engine falls silent; when you shut down the computer after a demanding day’s work; when the grandchildren finally go home - and ‘breathe’… your body slumps, your eyes close, no more is required of you.

So Jesus sleeps, afforded much-needed privacy by the wooden sides of the vessel (which would have been about the length of our aisle, but a little wider at its middle).

Only a third of his disciples were fishermen, and, though used to inland lakes like the Sea of Galilee, Jewish sailors were generally not adventurous crossing open water. Culturally, the sea was regarded as a chaotic and dangerous space, one that swamped and destroyed, as the waters of Noah’s flood and the storm that swallowed Jonah, depicted.

But Andrew, Peter, James and John were pros on their lake. They were familiar with the sudden storms that swirled the water, funnelled by mountain winds. They probably felt that, when the furious squall struck, they should have been able to cope. Except that they couldn’t. It was all too much and they were overwhelmed, fearful of a desperate end: ‘We’re going to drown!’

So genuine fear fuelled their accusation to Jesus, as well as a learnt cultural anxiety and their obvious inadequacy in spite of all their experience. Perhaps they also felt ashamed. Here was their leader, trusting them to get on with it, and they were letting him down. And because shame is uncomfortable, our initial reaction is often to try and displace it by lashing out: ‘Teacher, don’t you care?’

Actually, to cry out to Jesus, acknowledging that we can’t cope, is the best thing we can do. The Psalms are full of such prayers, desperate pleas for God to act, that are often accusatory: ‘Come on God, we’re people of faith, where are you when it matters?! Don’t you love us?’ In the midst of this storm, Jesus appears to be oblivious.

Sometimes, a picture is given to new Christians that, with enough faith, they might expect their path always to be relatively smooth, preserved from major danger, because, after all, they are ‘God’s children and under His protection.’ But chasing that idea results in believers behaving like petulant infants, demanding their every request to be satisfied. In fact, what life has demonstrated to countless faith-filled Christians is that: ‘While the grace of God protects us from nothing, it sustains us in everything.’

We cannot always understand why bad things are happening or see why God isn’t responding as we hope.

* Sometimes, we just have to go through the storm, only realising as we look back that, in fact, Jesus has been with us in it.
* Sometimes, only when we’re hopeless and battered, do we really cry out honestly … to discover that our answers are found in Christ.

God wants that honesty – and he wants us still to trust in him. In fact, it is only in our times of need, of duress, that we really test and prove the reliability of God. We may well approach our faith with a clear understanding of Christ’s divinity, but, just as the disciples are discovering, our trust has to be worked out through what happens to us day by day.

I’m not exactly sure what the twelve were anticipating that a bleary-eyed Jesus could do – help with bailing out the rapidly filling boat? All we do know is that, when Jesus acts, he operates in a way that is far bigger than their expectations.

So far in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ followers have only seen his authority exercised in healing physical or demonic illness and forgiving people. Here, suddenly, their perspective is expanded, as he takes control of the wind and water, muzzling their destructive power.

The twelve all grew up knowing their Psalms, which make clear that only God can control creation:

* Ps 89 – ‘Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? … 9You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.’
* Ps 65 – ‘You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Saviour, … 7who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves ..’
* And when, in Ps 107, some sailors ‘were at their wits’ end [and] cried out to the Lord in their trouble, .. he brought them out of their distress. 29He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.’

And now their tired leader, Jesus, has done just that! No wonder they were ‘in absolute awe, staggered,’ as *The Message* puts it.

Sometimes God waits until all human effort is exhausted to demonstrate his power, when no one can explain away what happens as ‘natural’. And often he answers our prayers far beyond the scope of what we asked for. He is God. His ways are not our ways - yet he is also with us, for us.

Recently the *Open the Book* team dramatised this story and we had to consider the question of how Jesus spoke to his followers as the storm suddenly ceased?

* Was he, the divine one, genuinely puzzled about their fear and lack of trust? No – Jesus was human and understands our anxieties.
* Was he frustrated because they still hadn’t cottoned on; all his efforts to teach them still hadn’t landed? Perhaps there was an element of that, from a weary servant!
* Was he angry, giving them a telling off? I think he understood that they had humanly done their best and were now exhausted.
* Nether-the-less, it was important that they grasped that they no longer had to rely on their own resources because he was with them. So, more than anything, he may have been sad for them, because they had been terrified yet didn’t need to be; because he was sufficient for all their needs and they hadn’t realised it yet.

Does God always make our paths smooth? No. Does he preserve us from all danger? No. Does he understand and address our fear? Yes. Does he offer comfort and a way through? Yes – when we entrust ourselves to him. We can have huge head-knowledge about the living God – but, what the disciples were learning through experience, and what we have to learn in real time today, is what it means to trust ourselves to him in every circumstance, good and bad. And that is not about head-knowledge but involves a heart-relationship with Jesus, our saviour.

It is only when we dare to rely on him that we experience the wonder of seeing God respond, which in turn vindicates and strengthens our faith. The more we trust Jesus as Lord of our lives, the more we understand his love, his power, his care and his delight in us, which helps us to worship him, regardless of what’s happening.

As Jesus calmed the overwhelming storm, something of his true significance ‘flashe[d] forth momentarily, revealing briefly the full light to come,’ although the twelve would take a while to catch up… But as his followers today, we have the benefit of the whole biblical picture. If, unlike the disciples, we are not surprised that: ‘Even the wind and the waves obey him!’ what impact does that have on our trust in him this coming week? And what impact could it have as we worship our great, saving God? **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Bryan**

Heavenly Father, we come before you in the greatness of your love and lift up our hearts in prayer and praise. We thank you that your presence in our lives is open to each and every one of us through Jesus Christ and that you invite us all to draw near to you in faith and thanksgiving.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

Let us pray for our church here in Burton and Shotwick as we pray for your blessing on its activities and its hopes and aspirations. We give thanks for those who come to serve, for the ministry of John and others and for those who seek to support the church in its wider ministry.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray in gratitude for the worship and fellowship that this church provides; for its care and its teaching of people of all generations and for its nurture and love towards one another.

Heavenly Father, help us all to see the kind of church that is needed today, that we might not lose sight of the many and varied needs of our communities in Burton, Puddington and Shotwick and the surrounding areas.

Dear Lord and Father, as we read your word from today’s Bible reading and from the teaching presented to us this morning, help us to grasp the meaning of the gospel which you have entrusted to us, and give us grace to live by all that we hear.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are less fortunate than ourselves; those who live in developing countries and areas of the world where there is very little social, economic or political stability.

Teach us to be ever mindful of those who have become weary with the relentless struggle to keep alive; for those who are not able to look forward to a meal and a comfortable bed, and those who barely have the essential necessities of life.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

We pray for people within our own church and our own local community who are ill or housebound, in hospital or in care.

Help them, through your presence and their contact with others, to have confidence in doctors and carers who provide the support they need. We pray also for your blessing on our own pastoral aid group who seek to provide support.

Give grace to all those who suffer in mind, body or spirit and we pray especially for those who have no one to help them, that in their loneliness they may know that you are with them.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them, for members of our own families who have died, either recently or long ago, and whose presence we miss so much.

Help all of us to put our trust in you and to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit within us, and to lean upon the fellowship of this church family that is around us.

We pray for families throughout the world whose lives and families are being torn apart through war. We remember in our prayers this morning the conflicts in Israel and Palestine and in Ukraine as well as those who suffer through famine and malnutrition in other parts of the world.

We pray for those in authority, for those who wield power and influence over others, that they will use their authority responsibly and fairly for the greater good of all mankind.

**Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer**

As the General Election nears we pray for those who are involved, that God would bless each candidate, successful or not, with wisdom and grace and that God would intervene to bring the leaders who will best serve his vision for our nation into power.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**