



Revd Ro's Reflection on The 2nd Sunday Before Lent 2022 Year C

Revelation 4

Luke 8.22-25

Our gospel reading for this morning is the account from Luke of Jesus stilling the storm. I am one of the world's worst sailors having only been on the sea a few times and then only Channel crossings. I get sea sick standing on the Cob at Lyme Regis and just looking at the waves! I have huge admiration for those who do 'go down to the sea in ships.'

I said the other week when I looked at Jesus calling Simon and the other fishermen that the Sea of Galilee is prone to sudden violent storms because it is more than six hundred feet below sea level, it is surrounded by hills and mountains, the rivers cut deep ravines and pour down into the lake. The winds rush down these valleys on to the water. The result is the phenomenon of the sudden storm. There is no doubt these sudden storms are life threatening to this day.

Some time ago I watched a fascinating series of programmes with David Suchet. He became a Christian after reading a New Testament placed in his hotel bedroom. In the programmes he visits sites throughout the Holy Land retelling the gospel stories. It was very moving. On one occasion he looked at the 'Galilee boat.' It is an ancient fisherman's boat from the first century AD. It was discovered by modern fishermen in 1986 in the Sea of Galilee during a drought. The hull is almost complete; it is fascinating to think of it as the type of boat Simon and his fellows would have used. It certainly enables us to imagine the scene. It is only about seven feet wide, a small boat to be tossed around like a cork on wild waters.

²² 'One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, ²³ and while they were sailing he fell asleep.

Jesus was heading to the 'country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee,' it is there he heals the man who his demon possessed. Jesus shows his power over the forces of evil. One of the central

points of this story is that it illustrates Jesus' power over nature. To the Jews the sea was a place of evil, of threat, of mystery, a place that contained huge evil creatures, think of Jonah and the whale. Many of the psalms make this belief obvious. Jesus has power to conquer evil. He has power over the forces of darkness and he has power over creation. This is not the sea it is a lake but those storms have the power to wipe out life in a trice. It is just as dangerous there. These were seasoned fishermen, used to the sudden storms on the Sea of Galilee. This one must have been terrible to cause panic among them.

'A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. ²⁴They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'

There is no doubt about the terror of the disciples, they know they are staring death in the face and any moment could be their last. It is to Jesus they call. They have seen the wonders of his healing and his power so in their terror they call to him. Jesus has power over evil. Surely, we ask, shouldn't they have understood Jesus' power over cosmic forces? For that is what we see here, it is what Luke means his readers to see. This shows Jesus' power over creation.

Look at Psalm 65 which is set for today,

'You still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves and the clamour of the peoples.'

No quotation could be more appropriate for what is happening out in the storm on the lake. Jesus stops the storm in its tracks.

'And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, 'Where is your faith?''

This is not just another wonderful sign, this is cosmic. Jesus is in control of nature. Why wouldn't he be, he created it. I have said that the readings chosen over the last few weeks show us epiphany moments in Jesus' life, when people come to a realisation of who this is. Only God has power over nature, why? because God created it. Jesus is part of the Godhead.

¹'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.' (John 1)

John could not be clearer, in the first lines of his gospel he states Jesus Christ is God. The gospel account we have just read points to exactly that. Here in this tiny fishing boat lost on the mighty waters is the presence of God. One word from his mouth and the storm is stilled, nature - and all that is - is under his control.

Jesus condemns their lack of faith. They had seen the wonderful signs he had performed yet still fall short. Now however their words hit the nail on the head.

²⁵'They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

Who is this? – this is the ruler of the universe because as part of the Godhead it is his. It is not just the power over the physical universe, 'who is this that even the wind and sea obey him,' there is only one answer to that; it is about cosmic power now. Jesus with his Father has power over all

because he created it. What could be seen as a story we have heard from our childhood is actually seismic! All evil falls before the power of God.

Jesus is the Saviour of humanity; at Calvary he will vanquish the power of sin and evil forever by love. At his resurrection, death 'will have no more dominion.' At his coming the seeds of God's new creation are sown and at his second coming when he comes to judge the peoples the new creation will be brought to fruition. Then God's Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. All this is contained in this story.

On another level it talks to us of God's peace. Think of the resurrection appearance in the upper room. 'Peace be with you, do not be afraid.' Think of his words to the disciples at his last meal with them, John 14:

²⁷ 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'

Think of the hymn 'Still the storms of strife and passion, bid its cruel discords cease.' Where Jesus is there is peace, only when people turn their back on him and the kingdom values can the evils of this world take hold.

Jesus' words 'Do not be afraid for I am with you,' are true for us now as much as they were for the disciples and all Jesus' followers through the generations past and to come. This is the wonder of our faith, Jesus is always here. We talk to him in prayer, we rest in his presence. Whatever we have to face we do not face it alone the 'creator of the stars and sea' is with us. Jesus calls on us to have faith in him and in his power. He will never let us down.

Our New Testament reading is from Revelation. I, like many people, am not ashamed to say that I think, 'Oh heck' when faced with passages from the Revelation of St. John the Divine. I am no biblical scholar. All I write week by week are my reflections on the various passages. I will do the same with chapter 4 of Revelation. I think we need to look at it in the light of the other passages set for today. The gospel passage as we have seen shows Jesus' power over nature and thus over evil in all its forms. Nature if you like bows before the Godhead. The psalm set is Psalm 65, often known as the 'harvest psalm' because it rejoices in God's creation, in God's power over creation and ultimately creation's worship of the creator.

⁸ 'Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.'

It is a hymn of praise to God for his wonderful creation and his presence within it and power over all.

¹² 'The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.'

I used to love singing this when I was in the choir; it is a shout of joy to the creator God. The Old Testament reading is the story of creation from Genesis 2. The story of God creating all that is in the world. If we put this creation story next to the story in Genesis 1 we have these words,

¹ 'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,'

John must have had these words in mind when he wrote the first words of his gospel,

'In the beginning was the word,' and then of course the creation statement which follows.

I love the words which follow from that first creation story.

'while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; '

When I was little I remember one day looking up at a black louring sky full of heavy clouds. Suddenly there was a break in the clouds and the sun's rays pierced the darkness. The light seemed to reach down to the earth. I saw then what I was pleased to call, 'the reflection from an angel's wing.' What I was trying to do was to put into words the indescribable, not just the beauty I had witnessed but what was for me a glimpse of the power and the glory of God. For me then heaven was somewhere up there. Actually heaven is the realm of God, the sphere of God's presence. When an old lady in the Northern Isles was asked, 'Where is heaven?' she answered, 'A few feet above our heads.' She is not far off. Think of the Celtic, 'thin places' like Skellig Michael, Lindisfarne and Iona; these were places where 'the veil between heaven and earth was very thin.' Why, because they were places dedicated to the worship of God, places where the presence of God was very real.

St. John is vouchesafe a vision of the reality of the throne room of God. People throughout history, both poets and hymn writers have tried to describe this. Think of a few of the hymns we know. St. John is invited into the presence,

^{4.1} 'After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'

The trumpet usually heralds greatness and St. John has been given a vision of the throne room of God. He has seen in his vision the glory of God. How do you describe the indescribable? To express his experience is almost impossible and he uses symbolism. He describes what is precious beyond measure, beautiful and full of wonder by comparing it with what is beautiful and precious within our understanding.

² 'At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!

³ And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. '

His vision is beyond words. But I think that this is at the centre of the passage.

'Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.'

What is central is worship, the worship of God by all creation. So we have,

⁴ 'Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads.

The twenty four represent the tribes of Israel and the apostles who worship day and night. White of course is the symbol of purity. Around the throne is lightning and thunder, the power of God.

'Around the throne and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:' the eyes represent continual watchfulness in worship. The creatures will be familiar to us,

⁷'the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.'

They represent creation; the lion, the king of beasts, the ox strongest of domesticated animals, the eagle seen as the greatest bird and the man humanity. They are engaged in ceaseless worship. We might also recognise the four creatures as the symbols of the gospel writers, used presumably because within their writings they are giving glory and worship to God. These four creatures appear in the east window at St. Leonard's.

The creatures represent the natural world and they naturally worship God the creator God. Think of the other readings set for today about God's power in creation. Their worship of the creator is continual.

'Day and night without ceasing they sing,
'Holy, holy, holy,
the Lord God the Almighty,
who was and is and is to come.'

It is the human who is the rational thinking being among all life on earth, the being created in God's image and it is humanity who knows the reason for worship.

¹¹ 'You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.'

I have put the 'for' in bold as it is **because** God is creator of all, in control of all that he is worthy of worship and praise. We are his, all things come from him. Think of the words in our service, 'worship and honour and glory and power be yours for ever and ever,' it is our role, our privilege to worship God our creator who is love, who is goodness. God is three persons in one God. God is creator, redeemer and sustainer, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is our saviour and the Holy Spirit is with us. No wonder we stand before God lost in wonder, love and praise!

When I sit quietly looking out over the countryside or as I write now with a fantastic sunrise in front of me, I feel very near to God the creator. Poets have tried to describe this and my quotation today is one of my favourites. It is from the poem God's 'Grandeur'.

*'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;...*

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.' Gerard Manley Hopkins

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