**Sermon on Trinity 3, Sunday 20th June 2021 by Rev’d Colin Hurford**

2 Corinthians 6.1-13

Mark 4.35-end

I don’t know if anyone here has been in a storm at sea. I remember taking a holiday in a cargo ship which also took passengers. It was carrying goods from Singapore round the north coast of the Island of Borneo when we found ourselves in the middle of a very bad tropical storm. Half the crew were seasick as well as almost all the passengers. And I have a clear memory of the crew trying to unload a pile of steel and it all fell into the sea - the ship was plunging up and down so much. It was not very enjoyable but we weren’t in any real danger unlike the disciples in the little fishing boat powered only by oars and a sail. They were in the middle of one of the very fierce storms that often swept down from the high mountains in the north of Galilee.

I think it was two years ago that I led a meditation on the “Stilling of the Storm” suggesting that when storms of life threatened to overwhelm us or perhaps a member of the family or friend, we could imagine Jesus standing in front of us (or the person we were thinking about) and saying “Peace be still”. It is a very helpful meditation and it does work as I have experienced myself. But I don’t want to repeat that address. Instead I wan’t to think about Jesus asleep. There is the boat being literally tossed about, water pouring in over the sides - too much to bail out. It seems to the disciples that hey are going to sink in the middle of the lake with little hope of getting to the shore alive. Yet Jesus is asleep. “Don’t you care?” they cry.

I wonder how many of us have had something of the same experience - facing a great problem, praying about it and, unlike Jesus stilling the storm, nothing much happening. St. Paul must have felt that when facing great danger or extreme pain as you heard in the first reading from his account of the hardships he suffered. But Paul was helped by three things. First he knew he was up against very strong opposition - he writes “for our struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in heavens places.” He knew his work would involve strong opposition.

Second, his experience of the presence of Jesus made him sure that Jesus was with him no matter what happened. Again he writes, speaking himself, “for I know that such a person was caught up into paradise.” Perhaps some of us have had an overwhelming sense of the presence of God which sees us through the difficult times. And thirdly, in some strange way Paul felt that his suffering was aligned to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. He writes in Colossians, “In my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions“ And this wasn’t just persecution for he had some kind of affliction, perhaps illness, which he asks to be removed and was told by God, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness”.

To go back to the Gospel and the disciples shout of anguish. The same thought also appears in the psalms, especially Psalm 44 where after a defeat of the Israelites armies, the Psalmist really tells God off. “Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord. Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?” The disciples may have had this psalm in mind when they shook Jesus and cried, “Do you not care that we are perishing? It clearly is a thought that goes back for over two thousand years and many people have struggled with it including some of our own saints.

So what can I say to those who cry out to Jesus and there seems to be no answer? Here I feel very humble because I am speaking to some of you who face far more difficult problems than I have faced for a very long time. It is very many years since I had that feeling of calling out to Jesus for myself and not seeming to receive an answer - although praying for others can raise the same problem. So just a few things to think about.

The first is that in some mysterious way we can align our suffering - including pain due to illness -with the sufferings of Jesus . Put the pain into Jesus hands and say “Lord, use this in some way to your glory.” And trust Him to do that.

The second is cling to your faith in Jesus. Without Him there is no purpose in life and no point to the suffering. Hold fast to your faith. There are some who, when prayer doesn’t seem to be answered, say “You don’t have enough faith.” Sometimes this can be true but I don’t believe that is the case when we pray deeply. I think the answer goes far beyond those who imply we have not enough faith. We should not blame ourselves for unanswered prayer.

And the third thing is quite simply that Jesus does care. Jesus loves us and is with us especially in those very difficult times although we may not feel His presence. St. Paul writes, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”. He is with us in even in our darkest moments. And His was the darkest of all when He died on the cross.

Amen.

Rev’d Colin Hurford