

## **SERMON: Sunday – 20 June 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **God is ready to help you right now**

**2 Cor 6:1-13**

**Mark 4:35-41**

It's been a week where we've learned that it appears to be more desirable for our government to make trade deals with the most far away countries rather than with our closest neighbours. Deals which threaten the very future of the farmers and fishermen on our own doorstep.

Madness! You'd never know we were in the grip of a climate emergency when decisions are made to regularly ship hormone injected beef 9,500 miles across the ocean. What sort of a message does that send to our young people about taking climate change seriously.

There seem to be no shortages of storms in our lives at the moment.

And so we turn to God for help.

The Scriptures for today declare that "God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation. At the right time I heard you say the Lord".

These are stirring words of hope for any age.

The context for that quote from Isaiah 49:8 is exile in Babylon and the promise of a future restoration for Israel.

Indeed the original context is a prophecy, a future tense word given whilst in the midst of a 70 year exile. Some would have heard the word and not seen it come to pass.

At the right time, in the fullness of time, I will hear you.

Those in exile would need to hang onto the hope of the word coming to pass.

They would be called to faith, to believe for what was yet unseen.

It's what Jesus did.

Jesus, the One who commands the storm, the wind and the waves (40-41) called people to (have) faith.

Jesus reveals to us that he, God, can be called upon in the midst of the storm. God is not sleeping through it but ready to be awakened into it so as to get through it with us.

He who watches over you O Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121).

I was reminded of this in this past week, journeying with a family who have suddenly been confronted with the loss a loved one, someone they'd depended on, who is no longer with them.

A death or a sudden illness can be like a storm that suddenly engulfs you and can leave you bereft and wondering, questioning, suffering.

And yet it's often at times of crisis like this, times of storm, that from somewhere deep comes a longing for help.

It's a privilege to be with people when they are going through a storm. And I've often found that perhaps the best way to help is to simply be with those who suffer, just to be present, saying only a few words, maybe that's the best way for them to discover the anchor in their storm as God present with them.

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote a book about this called "God in pain", in which she writes about how God transforms pain and suffering not by avoiding it but by going through it with us.

Only a suffering God could do that, a God who is willing to suffer with and for and on behalf of his beloved.

Those words of Paul's when he writes to the fledgling Christians at Corinth about how to conduct ourselves reveals something of how Christians are to live in stormy times.

He says, "We try to live in such a way that no one will be hindered from finding the Lord by the way we act" (3).

He doesn't say we are careful about what we say, which of course we must be, but the emphasis is on how we act. Our actions speak volumes especially in storms.

Oh it's so good to know that God can be called upon at any time, even during the most violent storm.

God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation. At the right time I heard you says the Lord.

God is not asleep in the boat, deaf to our shouting, immune to our suffering.

Jesus entered into all of humanity in order to live with, suffer with, rejoice with, mourn with, grieve with, eat with, drink with, work with, play with, rest with, sing with, sit in silence with, seek with, intercede with, give thanks with, to prove that God is God with us, always, ever present.

But we can't deny the fact that Jesus was asleep through the storm and needed to be roused by the disciples. What comforts me from that scenario is that Jesus mustn't be worried about the storm. Was he thinking that storms come and go and that they are simply a part of life that we might notice but refuse to let them rob us of our peace?

We have a God who is not blown over by storms but who rests in the midst of them. Does this mean that we too, who are made in God's image, have the capacity to rest through the storm?

Or is it necessary for us to experience the fear, the pain, the loss, so as to experience the faith that comes only afterwards?

From, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?"

To, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him".

What kind of God is this?  
One who cares for us?

Like the disciples, we're left wondering after the event.

I remember someone very dear to me reaching a point in her young life when she said to God, ok God, if you're real, show yourself.

How often I've heard of others also praying that same prayer, that same call from the depth within.

And how often it's been answered, not usually with a lightning bolt from the sky but with a calm assurance that enters the psyche, an inner voice of love as Henri Nouwen called it, a deep sense of peace, that all is ok and all will be ok.

I know that was my own experience looking back. That all the worrying questions I had about life suddenly became not as important when I realised that God was real and there to help.

So whatever storm you are facing, illness, death, worry, anxiety, uncertainty, depression, fear, whatever it is, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation. At the right time God will hear you.

May the Spirit of God come upon you and rise up from within you and answer you.

And when it comes to climate change and trade deals, may we pray that our politicians and decision makers will come to seek the God who is always ready to help them in their decision making.

Amen.