



# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

**Reading** Mark 4:35-41

## **Sermon: 28 June 2009**

The text for the sermon is verse 40:

<sup>40</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Have you still no faith?"

In the Gospel of Mark this passage is a notable one since it follows after Jesus told his followers some parables. It is as if Mark is preparing us for some action by Jesus after he taught his followers. What follows now is actually a summary of the whole Gospel. In the Gospel of Mark it is apparent that the disciples did not know who Jesus was. Time and time again they would be confronted by the question about Jesus' identity.

In all the Gospels the Sea of Galilee is associated with the public life and ministry of Jesus. Capernaum, "his own city" (Matt. 9:1), stood on its shores. From among the fishermen who plied their calling on its waters he chose Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John, to be disciples, and sent them forth to be "fishers of men". In John 21 the Sea of Galilee is also the place where Jesus showed himself after his resurrection to his disciples.

In this story Mark is telling us that after Jesus told his followers all the parables, he commanded them to go to the other side of the lake. In Matthew this story is the start of gentile mission because the other side was the place where the Gentiles lived. And in those days, no Jew would dare to go to the other "Gentile" side. If you did, you were considered as unclean and not allowed into the temple. Apart from this fact, due to the nature of the Sea of Galilee or the Lake as it was also called, fishermen did not generally venture far from the shore. This sea was renowned for its vicious and sudden storms that could erupt in seconds. All the fishermen were quite weary of the conditions. In this case they did what Jesus had told them to do. They did not even change their clothes. The other reason may be that Jesus was tired after his teaching and needed some time of rest.

The Sea of Galilee is 6 miles or 9.7 kilometers wide and 12 1/2 miles long and it lies at 211 m below sea-level. The position of the lake in the depths of the Jordan Rift and surrounded by hills, made it liable to sudden storms. The cool air from the uplands rushing down the gorges with great violence and tossing the waters in tumultuous billows made it a very unsafe place to be at. In our reading we can almost sense the fear and anxiety of the disciples. They could not believe their eyes that Jesus could sleep in such a storm. Therefore they rebuked him with the words: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Then a miracle happened as Jesus stood up. He commanded nature to calmness. He did something that only God can do. In the Old Testament it is quite clear that God is the creator of heaven and earth. Only God have power over creation. It must have been clear to them now that Jesus was from God, although in the gospel of Mark they still did not grasp this fact. It was only after Jesus' resurrection that they realized who He really was. Jesus also responded to their lack of faith. Mark is actually telling us that if the disciples knew who Jesus was, they would have known better than to be anxious or scared. They would have trusted him enough to know that He would save them.

And then their question hangs in the air: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

What do we answer to this question? Whatever we say, our deeds must correspond to it! If we say he is the Saviour of humanity, we must live his grace and mercy wherever we go. If we say He is the God of love, we must convey it in all the things we do and say. If we say He is the Lord God, our lives must bear witness to this faith.

Then the message of the passage becomes clearer. If we know and confess who Jesus really is to us, then we too do not ever have to be frightened or fearful. If we confess him as our Lord and Saviour, we will experience his powerful presence wherever we go.

But we are also human and finite just like the disciples. We experience also the same feelings of fear and anxiety especially when we find ourselves on life's sea surrounded by storms like sickness, death, broken relationships, and loss of jobs, depression, poverty, addictions and feelings of guilt. We all know how it feels when you suddenly get the news that a beloved has died. We all know how out of depth and without any words we are when we stand beside the bed of a dear one that is suffering a life threatening illness. We all know how it feels when our children are in trouble and struggling to find the arms of our Lord. We all know how fearful we all are of the current financial crisis. And yes some of us know how nit feels when your career comes to an abrupt end because of the current financial crisis.

We are all in the same boat – pardon the pun - on a sea that can only survive because of the presence of Our Lord and Saviour. If we dare to go on sailing on our own, we will drown and go under. If we trust the Lord the waves and the wind will subside and we will experience the peace and the presence of God in our daily living. We must also know that all we need to survive is faith, trust and hope in the God who created heaven and earth.

The time has come for us all to trust more and fear less. We are not alone. In every storm, God is there. In every wind that is blowing, God is there. He is even there when we feel utterly lost and without control. He is also there when it feels as if we are drowning.

God is giving us a very powerful message. We must trust him, despite all our fears and anxieties.

Life is not always plain sailing. It is a struggle where only those who have faith will be the survivors.

May we all learn to trust the Lord more and more, in the small and the larger things that happens, every moment of every day!

**Amen**

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## **Readings for the week**

### **Mark 4:35-41 (from Rootsontheweb.com)**

The Story gives an unambiguous answer to the debate about Jesus authority that has been running through the early chapters of Mark. Who can forgive sins (Mark 2:6-11)? By what power does Jesus cast out demons (Mark 3:22)? In a manner reminiscent of Job, the disciples are changed from one kind of fearfulness to another. The word for awe', emphasised by repetition in the Greek, is used regularly for fear of the Lord' in the Old Testament. The disciples are rebuked for their cowardliness and lack of trust. However, unlike the God of Job, but like that of the psalmist, God in Jesus responds effectively to their personal distress.

**Other readings:** Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13