



# Sunday Reflection

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 23 June 2024

## Pentecost 5

### The Curate will preach at St John's

The Christian life can lead us into uncharted waters. But God is our refuge and God's help is stronger than our deepest fear. And so, we turn in trust to worship the God who holds all creation in his loving care.

*He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.*  
(Mark 4.39)

#### A story

It had been a long day. So many people. It seemed as though they would never stop coming. Since I followed the Teacher and became part of his group at Capernaum it's been the same, day-in and day out. The amazing healings, the mysterious teaching. You just feel drawn to stay with him, despite the discomfort and the nagging question, where is all this leading?

And just as we were turning for home he says, 'Let's go over to the other side'. That's what he's like you know, full of surprises that catch you off guard. It made sense to be here on the northwest shore of the lake where the teaching can be heard by so many. But the other side? The Gentile side? Why go to where is unclean?

Now I'm a fisherman so I can handle a boat and I'm proud to say he sometimes stands in my boat or Peter's, and we hold it steady while he teaches those on the shore. But we keep pretty much inland. We looked at each other when he called to go right across the lake, but we promised to follow, so the best we could do was try and keep him safe and make sure he was in one of our boats. That windstorm, it came out of nowhere, six-foot waves, swamping the boat. We thought that was it, all our hopes, all this talk of a new Kingdom, about to be wiped out before it had properly started. And to be honest, I felt a bit let down. The Teacher was asleep, totally disconnected from all that was happening, just when we might have hoped he could have called on God or at least been with us and offered some comfort. But then the biggest surprise of the night. We shook him awake and he stood up and stopped the wind and said 'be silent to the waves, and the storm stopped just like that, and the lake was as calm as a millpond. And then we really were scared. We thought we'd started to get to know this teacher. But who was he really? Surely only God can command the winds and the waves. What have we gotten into?

## **A reflection**

Throughout the Bible, God's power is revealed through his command over the waters, as when he divided the waters of the red sea. At the very beginning of our journey of faith, our baptism, God's power is recalled in this way.

*Holy God, well-spring of life,  
in your love and justice,  
you use the gift of water to declare your saving power.*

...

*You command the wildness of the waves;  
when the storm rages you calm our fear;  
in the stillness you lead us to a deeper faith. (Baptism service)*

That night on the stormy waters of the Sea of Tiberias or Lake Gennesaret, which the early Christians were to call the Sea of Galilee, the disciples experienced that awesome power. The man they knew as a captivating and authoritative teacher, a powerful healer, a dear master and perhaps already a friend was also something more. He was their Lord, their God. The voice that had called the wind and waves into being now commanded them before their eyes and those same elements recognized his voice and obeyed. No wonder the disciples were awe-struck and bewildered.

In fact, they had anticipated this revelation, in the way that sometimes happens to us all, when something below the level of our conscious awareness is about to surface and be recognised. In their terror at the waves that were about to overwhelm them, they had called out to Jesus, just as the Psalmists and people throughout the ages have called out to God in moments of terror, despair or extreme peril.

*Do you not care that we are perishing? (v.38b).*

And Jesus answers them by addressing the wind and the waves in words that also recall a Psalm. He orders them, 'Be quiet' or 'be still', ('Peace' in our translation). Would the disciples have heard the echo of Psalm 46?

*Be still and know that I am God (v.10).*

It is human to be overwhelmed by fear when we are threatened – by physical violence, by existential threats to our planet, our world, the values we believe in, the security we know. But Jesus says that we should not put our faith in fear. We owe our trust to God and God alone.

*God is our refuge and our strength,*

*A very present help in trouble.*

*Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change,*

*though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

*though its waters roar and foam,*

*though the mountains tremble with its tumult. (Psalm 46. 1-3)*

God's voice is stronger. We may think it is all up to us to steer the boat and command the direction of our lives. But the authority to do that belongs to God.

### **A prayer**

God, our maker and defender, may I seek my refuge in You and never let my fears and anxieties take your place in my heart. May I be ready to take risks for your sake and come to trust You more and more. Lead us, your Church, we pray to follow where You are going and not to fear the storms. Amen.

*He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. (Mark 4.39)*

## **& the Rector's words will be used at St Margaret's:-**

We gather today to worship the God of all creation, to acknowledge God's sovereignty, and to remind ourselves that all authority is under God. We hear in scripture how Jesus reveals his divinity as he commands the elements. And we re-commit ourselves to mindful responsibility in all our actions as stewards of God's creation.

*"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Mark 4:41*

### **An illustration to set the scene**

**King Canute** is perhaps the most misunderstood king in history.

The twelfth-century historian, *Henry of Huntingdon*, tells a story about events which allegedly took place a century ago.

Canute, Henry tells us, set up his throne beside the sea and commanded the tide not to come in.

Heedless, the sea continued its advance and Canute got his feet wet.

**“See?”** said Canute to his fawning courtiers. **“Earthly kings have their limitations. We are not omnipotent. Only God is the king whom heaven, earth and sea obey.”**

Unfortunately for Canute, the story has got mangled in transmission.

Instead of being an example of his humility in the face of courtiers who were telling him that he could do anything, poor Canute’s stunt is cited as an example of arrogance, hubris and an exaggerated sense of his own power and influence.

How stupid he is, to think he can stop the tide coming in!

But that, of course, is the point.

Canute doesn’t think he can stop the tide coming in – he knows he can’t.

He knows that only God can command the sea, that his earthly kingship is kingship under God, and that, whatever his followers think, he is not divine.

### **Today’s Gospel teaching**

Canute may not be divine, but Jesus is.

His disciples know him as a man, as a teacher, as a healer, and as a leader.

But their experience at this point in Mark's Gospel is of the humanity of the incarnation.

What happens now will turn all that upside down.

There's a lot of detail here.

Jesus, weary from preaching to the huge crowds who have gathered on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to hear him, tells his disciples to sail to the other side while he finds a cushion and settles down to sleep.

The reference to that homeliest of comforts, a cushion, again emphasises the physicality of Jesus' humanity.

But then a storm springs up – one of the sudden, fierce storms the area is notorious for, and which quickly whip up the shallow waters of the lake into waves that threaten to overwhelm the boat.

In their fear, they turn to their leader – how can he just carry on sleeping through this?

Doesn't he know we're all going to drown?

But what Jesus does next is more powerful than any of the signs they have seen him perform so far.

He commands the wind and the sea, and they obey him.

And like Canute, a millennium later, they know that only God can do that.

Who is this man?

**How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?**

A millennium after Canute got the hem of his robe and his royal slippers wet, we still have rulers who, encouraged by their followers, think they are God.

Rulers who have the power of life and death over individuals, communities and countries.

Rulers who, unlike Canute, do not realise the limits of their authority.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to challenge them, call them out and hold them to account, because they are usurping what is rightfully God's.

Only Jesus was both human and divine, God incarnate.

Despite the flattery of his courtiers, Canute knew he wasn't.

None of this gives us an excuse not to challenge and call to account the rulers, governments, big businesses and individuals who play a part in causing the present climate emergency that threatens so much of God's creation.

The wind and the sea – and floods and droughts – are wreaking unprecedented havoc as a result of the actions of humanity, actions which have also usurped what is rightfully the Creator's.

And every single one of us has had some part in that – often unwittingly, just going about our normal lives as consumers, enmeshed in the cogs of economies and infrastructures which we can do little to influence but which are, collectively, causing the climate change and rising sea levels which threaten to overwhelm the planet.

Just as Canute had no right to command the tides, so humanity has no right to wreck the planet of which God has given us stewardship of.

Canute knew it.

Do we?

*"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Mark 4:41*

[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)