

Sermon for Trinity 3 (B), 21st June 2015

‘Then they cried to the Lord in their need
and he rescued them from their distress’ (Psalm
107.28)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Imagine you are travelling on the sea, surrounded
by the vast amount of water with the horizon
nowhere to be seen.

How comfortable would you be getting onto a
boat with someone else taking full charge of it?

It is all very well when that person is someone you know to be an experienced sailor or, like the disciples were, a fisherman. But when you're not so sure about his or her boat steering skills, then you might find yourself facing both quite an exciting, and utterly terrifying experience.

Two weeks ago, three of my friends had been put through exactly that when I took a steer while punting on the river Cam in Cambridge. I was very enthusiastic about it and tried to keep calm and composed, but there were a few moments when our boat was getting just a little bit too close to other boats on the river, and it almost seemed like we were heading for a crash. It was more the matter of luck than my steering skills that we didn't end up hitting another boat at the end. We

did enjoy it though. The weather was stunning and we had just finished another year of training at theological college.

One can imagine that Jesus' disciples would be familiar with water and the fear of it would be completely alien to them. Yes, there was a powerful storm which was filling the boat with water, but at the same time, experienced fishermen as they were, they would know how to deal with it. And they DID have Jesus on the boat with them. So why the panic and such a desperate cry: 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!'

This most ordinary everyday thing, water, can create joy and fear. The disciples panicked,

because what happened there in the boat was out of their control: 'it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped.' They could not do anything else but cry for help.

The cry for help is not something that any of us would be unfamiliar with. When we were born, the first thing we did was to cry. When we were growing up we were asking our parents and friends for help. And now, no matter how old or young we are we often find ourselves in situations that we don't know how to deal with and might feel like the disciples in the boat, not cared for even by Him whom we trust with our own lives.

Jesus 'was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep' (v.36).

'Master, do you not care? We are going down!'
The disciples cried out.

Notice the contrast between the despair of the disciples and the calmness of Jesus. Why was Jesus not afraid? Why was he asleep while the waves were raging and his friends were in danger? Did he really not care? Or did he know that the waves and the wind were under God's command and that this life's despair would be defeated by the love of God which endures for ever.

Do you ever ask God when things are getting hard: 'Do you not care? I am going down!' I do.

Sometimes it is such a desperate prayer that can make you hear anew Jesus' words as they were directed unto you today:

‘Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?’

Notice, that Jesus didn't say, ‘You're not allowed to be frightened.’ Fear is a human emotion that we all experience. Jesus experienced it too when he was sweating with blood in Gethsemane where he prayed before his passion: ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want’ (Mt 26.39).

However, Jesus shows us the way out of fear. It is the way of simple trust in God, who as we have

heard in the first reading from the Book of Job, controls the power of the sea by setting its limits. 'Come thus far and no farther: here your proud waves shall break' (Job 38.11). In our Gospel reading, Jesus is in control of the elements, just as God is. He rebukes the wind and says to the sea: 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And so the wind drops and all is calm again.

The prayer of despair is not something we should be ashamed of. It is a prayer which may confront us with a painful truth that we don't yet trust enough in God's steadfast love. But it is also a prayer which may lead us to a simple trust of a person who knows that her or his own resources are not enough to cope with the overwhelming waves of life.

The cry: 'Do you not care? I am going down!' has a potential to remind us that God does in fact care, and that there are people out there who care for us too. Or who would care if we dared to ask for help.

The reason why we are here this morning is because we trust that God cares for us, that his love and compassion have been revealed in Jesus Christ and that we are his children. Through the waters of baptism we have been cleansed and rooted into Christ, but day after day we are also being reminded that we need help which comes from God and from our fellow men and women. Week by week, and day by day, we are being nourished by the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood when we gather together to celebrate Mass

as the people of God. The Holy Spirit, the giver of life, encourages us in faith and enables us to put our trust in Christ's power that we may know that we are truly God's children.

So how comfortable would you be with getting onto a boat with someone else taking full charge of it? What if this person was Jesus. How would you feel? Would you still be frightened? Or would you trust that he can say to the raging elements of the sea of your life: 'Quiet now! Be calm!'

Amen.