

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit: Worship at Home – 20 June 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

A Call to Worship: the beginning of Psalm 67
May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.

Hymn:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm does bind the restless wave,
Who bids the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril
on the sea.

O Saviour, whose almighty word
The winds and waves submissive heard,
Who walked upon the foaming deep,
And calm amid the rage did sleep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril
on the sea.

O Holy Spirit, who did brood
Upon the waters dark and rude,
And bid their angry tumult cease,
And give for wild confusion peace;
O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril
on the sea.

O Trinity of love and pow'r,
Your children shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire, and foe,
Protect them where-so-e'er they go;
Thus, evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Mighty God, who speaks a word of peace to calm
our troubled sea;
Caring God, who nudges us away from fear and
toward faith;
Ever-present God, who fills us with awe
but also raises many questions
without easy answers;
Open our eyes to see you in our boat—today,
Strengthen our hearts for the challenges that lie
ahead,
Open our ears this hour to hear the word you
speak.

God of love and power,
we listen to the stories of miracles and doubt that
these things can happen today.
We look at the waves of misfortune, distress,
misery, distrust, and anger
and wonder how we can still those waves.
We feel the pressures of power and fear flooding
into our lives,
threatening to drown us and wonder where you
are.
Forgive us for the littleness of our faith.
Forgive us for our doubts.
Help us to place out trust in you, Lord Jesus.
Help us to fix our eyes on you and on the
ministries to which you have called us.
For we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Fear not!
God is with us, stilling the storms and raging fears
in our lives.
Place your trust in God always. Amen.

Psalm 107: 23 – 32

- ²³ Some went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters.
²⁴ They saw the works of the Lord,
his wonderful deeds in the deep.
²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest
that lifted high the waves.
²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went
down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunkards;

they were at their wits' end.

²⁸ Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.

²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea^[a] were hushed.

³⁰ They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.

³¹ Let them give thanks to the Lord for his
unfailing love

and his wonderful deeds for mankind.

³² Let them exalt him in the assembly of the
people

and praise him in the council of the elders.

Mark 4: 35 - 41

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his
disciples, "Let us go over to the other
side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him
along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also
other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up,
and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was
nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern,
sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him
and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we
drown?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the
waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down
and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid?
Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other,
"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey
him!"

Hymn:

In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear:
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar around me,
my heart may low be laid;
my Father's arms surround me,
how can I be afraid?

Wherever he may guide me
no want shall turn me back;
my shepherd is beside me
and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom is for ever,

his sight is never dim;
his love deserts me never
and I will walk with him.

Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will shine with glory
where threatening clouds have been:
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my saviour has my treasure,
and he will walk with me.

Reflection

I wonder what the worst weather is you've ever
been caught up in. As part of my training for
ministry I was sent to the Shetland Islands for a
summer placement. In 1996 it took fourteen
hours to get from Aberdeen to Lerwick on a boat.
I returned to Shetland on sabbatical five years
ago, and they'd cut two hours off the journey, it
was just twelve hours. That first time I went, we
left the harbour in Aberdeen at six in the evening
in glorious sunshine, and the sea looking like a
lake. I soon realised that a storm can erupt from
nowhere. The boat suddenly started to rock. I
went to bed in my little cabin and tried to sleep. I
shut my eyes. The boat still rocked. I woke up and
thought we must be nearly there. I'd only slept
for half an hour and there was still about eleven
and a half hours to go. The storm felt too much
for me and I longed for the storm to pass and
calm again to come.

Psalms 107 as do many of the Psalms gives an
account of those who cry out to the Lord in their
distress. The Psalmist's boat like mine was
caught up in a storm. The Psalmist's words are
graphic. "They reeled and staggered like
drunkards, they were at their wits end."

That's an awful state to be in.

In the storms of our lives, of which there have
been many since Covid 19 first struck, to who do
we turn, to who do we cry out for help? Do we
cower in fear, convinced nobody can help us, or
do we listen for the still small voice, the one who
speaks to us through the storm, through the
earthquake, wind and fire? Or, does the storm

overwhelm us that we forget we are accompanied in it?

Mark has another graphic account of what a storm can do. The Sea of Galilee is six hundred feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and people living round it know well that when winds blow across the land, they get really strong close to the sea, causing violent and unexpected storms. So the disciples and Jesus go out in the boat - nothing unusual about that - and Jesus nods off in the stern - nothing unusual about that. But suddenly the storm rages and the disciples start to panic. And they say something really quite strong to Jesus: "do you not care that we are perishing?"

"Do you not care?" Often we say that to people when we're in a mess and we need some help. "Don't you care? Don't you care about me? Don't you care that I'm suffering? Don't you care that I'm in this mess?" Perhaps we say it to God in prayer: "God, why don't you do something? Have you stopped caring about me?" Jesus doesn't deal with their lack of faith straightaway. He deals with the situation. Often that's how he works. He looks at the wind head on and he rebukes it and there are three words - "Peace! Be still!" Then later of course he says to the disciples "what were you panicking about? Have you still no faith? And at the end of all of this the disciples are in awe, and wonder who it is they've started to follow.

Doubts about God do emerge in times of crisis, whether we find ourselves in a boat in a storm, whether we find ourselves in a pandemic, whether we find ourselves in sudden illness, whether we find ourselves in one of life's crises that hit us. Jesus' disciples find the situation more powerful than the presence of the one asleep in the boat for a little while - and sometimes like them, we underestimate the power of Jesus. At a human level we often act like the disciples, we need to be calm in the storm, we need to remember who travels in the storm with us. When we face situations of threat or danger, it's very easy to panic, but let's remember the two promises of our Scripture today.

First, Jesus' words to the disciples in the boat: "Have you still no faith?" Then his words to the elements: "Peace! Be still!"

I want to finally go back to the Psalm. The prayers in the Psalms are so honest. And in Psalm 107 we get people staggering like drunkards in the boat, people at their wits end, people crying to the Lord in their trouble, and like Jesus, God makes the storm be still and the waves of the sea are hushed. "Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven."

When I saw the port of Lerwick, after a horrific time, I was filled with calm because I was in the safety of dry land. The skill of the pilot of the boat had navigated the choppiness of the North Sea for us. I have the Desiderata in my study in a frame: "Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence." Jesus today whatever storm you face, enters it with you, his presence, even calmly at the back of your boat, means that you will not be submerged, you will not drown, so do not panic, peace, be still, let him calm the storm for you and let him lead you to your desired haven.

My Granny used to tell lots of stories and one story she used to tell was of a man who used to turn up at the front door of their house in Hertfordshire and would sing a hymn, and this is it. Where is your safe haven? And is our church a safe haven for the tempest tossed around us?

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From his lighthouse evermore,
But to us he gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.

Let the lower lights be burning;
Send a gleam across the wave.
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.

Do we stagger like drunkards at our wits end, do we shout " Lord, don't you care?" Or do we know the storm will pass, the haven will be safely reached.

Prayers of Intercession

God is our refuge and 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. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
(from Psalm 46)

Prayer for peace amidst the storm

Living God, our refuge and strength, even the wind and sea obey your voice. Put the wind back in its place, and say to the sea: Peace! Be still! Fill us with great faith, and save us from the surging water,
so that we may tell the good news of your saving love;
through Jesus Christ, our hope in the storm.
(based on Mark 4)

A Prayer for Rescue, Recovery and Relief workers

God our help and hope when waters rise, you brought Israel safely through the sea. Sustain all those who seek to save others, so that they may repair the ruined cities, raise up the former devastations,
and be the restorers of streets to live in; through Jesus Christ, our eternal savior. (based on Isaiah 58, 61)

Prayer in Times of Trouble

God of wind and water, stillness and storm, your Spirit sweeps over the surface of the sea. Give us faith to seek you in times of trouble. Reach out your hand to us when we are sinking so that we may believe and worship you; through Jesus Christ, Sovereign and Saviour.
(based on Matthew 14:22-33)

Holy One, you are our comfort and strength in times of sudden disaster, crisis, or chaos. Surround us now with your grace and peace through storm or earthquake, fire or flood.

By your Spirit, lift up those who have fallen, sustain those who work to rescue or rebuild, and fill us with the hope of your new creation; through Jesus Christ, our rock and redeemer.

Almighty and everlasting God, You are strength to those who suffer and comfort to those who grieve. Let the prayers of your children who are in trouble rise to you.

Hear our prayer.

We claim your promises of wholeness as we pray for those who are ill or are suffering loss and long for your healing touch.

Hear our prayer.

Make the weak strong, the sick healthy, the broken whole, and confirm those who serve them as agents of your love.

Hear our prayer.

To everyone in distress, grant mercy, grant relief, grant refreshment.

Hear our prayer.

As we begin to rebuild, we commend our neighbourhoods to your care. Give us strength of purpose and concern for others, that we may create a community where your will may be done.

Hear our prayer.

God of compassion, you watch our ways, and weave out of terrible happenings wonders of goodness and grace.

Hear our prayer.

Surround those who have been shaken by tragedy with a sense of your present love, and hold them in faith. Though they are lost in grief, may they find you and be comforted; Through Jesus Christ who was dead, but lives and rules this world with you. Amen

Hymn:

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but Thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness Thou dost know;
Thou didst tread this earth before us,

Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert Thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Nothing can our peace destroy.

May the peace of God which passes all
understanding keep our hearts and minds in the
knowledge of Christ our Lord, and the blessing of
God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all,
evermore. Amen.