

LIPHOOK METHODIST CHURCH
SUNDAY 21 JUNE 2015, 10am
TRINITY 3(B)

Readings: Mark 4:35-41

Water generally is really important:

- Drinking
- Washing
- Plants

But like all good things – you can have too much:

- Floods
- Sea level rises
- Storms

In baptism water is the main symbol for all those reasons:

Life-giving

Washing

Floods and storms

The Jewish people in OT times and up to Jesus' time were not a seafaring people. Water stood for chaos. So a storm at sea – or on a lake – was something to be feared.

This is an episode that reminds me of Jonah – sailors afraid because of a storm and seeking any way they could find of surviving.

When those disciples in that boat realised the extent of the storm they were frightened.

Quite often the writers of the Bible tell particular episodes in order to show us something about ourselves and our lives and not just to give an account of Jesus. In this story Mark is telling us that life can be like a boat trip on a lake. So as Jesus' disciples let's think about that boat trip and how it helps us with our discipleship as we seek to follow Jesus.

Sometimes life is plain sailing – gentle breeze, not much swell but enough to make progress.

Sometimes it might seem like a flat calm – no breeze, no progress – and that can be frustrating.

But that difficulty is nothing like a storm when the wind and the waves threaten not only progress but the safety of the boat and all who are in it.

There can be times in life when we simply don't know what to do – you might say we're all at sea – with no idea how to survive let alone make progress. Ever felt all at sea about life? Not sure which way to turn, not sure whether you'll get through whatever the difficulties are?

Mark's story is telling us that this is the time to remember that we're not on our own.

We may be all at sea but we're also all in the same boat.

When things are going well a crew works together well – steering, trimming sails, pulling ropes in or letting them out, catching the best of the wind.

It is when things are going badly that people panic, start fighting one another because they want to look out for themselves. In fear they forget that they're all in the same boat.

It is being in Church together that reminds us that we're all in the same boat. John Wesley pointed out that the New Testament knows nothing of solitary Christianity. That doesn't mean you can't be on your own as a Christian but it does mean that Christians are meant to be together and that however much you're on your own you're never on your own.

Mark is getting us to remember is that we're not alone in this boat. But we're not alone in two ways.

We're individually not on our own – we have others with us. Just look around and you see them – some of them because however many there are here it's never everyone who's in this boat with us.

But it's even more than that. The other way we're not on our own is that the whole Church community worldwide, all in the same boat is also not on its own in that boat. As a community of followers the Church is not alone because Jesus is in the boat too.

Sometimes it seems as though Jesus is asleep in the bottom of the boat, sometimes we let him sleep, we forget that he's there whatever the weather is like.

That bit reminds me of Jonah as well. In the storm Jonah went to sleep down below in the ship. The sailors had to wake him up to find out why they were in so much trouble and how they could survive.

Mark reminds us to wake Jesus up because he is the one who can help us through the storms so that the water does not overwhelm us.

Water is a reminder of at least two things:

If life threatens to overwhelm us – to immerse us and sink us in its storms – then we are in a boat with Jesus who is the man who calmed the sea and can calm our stormy seas too, hold our hands, envelop us in his loving arms and lead us safely home.

Water also reminds us – because we use it in baptism at the beginning of our lives of discipleship – water reminds us that life as a Christian following Jesus is also a subject of total immersion – it covers the whole of life, it's not just an hour on a Sunday but affects the way we navigate through our working lives, our leisure activities, our relationship and our families because he's there in the boat we just need to remember to wake him up because he won't force himself on us.

So when we're all at sea, lost, frightened and feeling threatened remember that we're all in the same boat and we're not on our own and wake Jesus up to lead us home.

This bit reminds me of Jonah as well. In Jonah chapter 2 when he was inside the fish Jonah prayed. You might think it was about time and possibly a bit late but I think this is where the sign of Jonah also comes in. Here's a bit of what Jonah prayed:

"In my distress, O LORD, I called to you,
and you answered me.

From deep in the world of the dead
I cried for help, and you heard me.

³You threw me down into the depths,
to the very bottom of the sea,
where the waters were all around me,
and all your mighty waves rolled over me.

⁵The water came over me and choked me;
the sea covered me completely,
and seaweed wrapped around my head.

Now remember this is from inside the fish – this is in the depths of the sea where all must have seemed utterly lost. Already we've heard tiny hints of hope – you answered me, you heard me, ...

But Jonah is the sign of hope that points towards the other person who slept in the bottom of a boat in a storm and who gives hope to all whose boats are tossed by the storms of life.

Listen to two more verses from Jonah's prayer – remember Jonah's prayer from *inside the fish* –

I said, "I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
towards your holy temple.

the earth beneath barred me in for ever.

*"But you, O LORD my God,
brought me back from the depths alive.*

And he ends – *from inside the fish*:

*But I will sing praises to you;
I will offer you a sacrifice
and do what I have promised.
Salvation comes from the LORD!"*

Back to the boat on Galilee several centuries later:

The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

Of course he cares he just wants us to know that he cares and if everything was always wonderful, if there was always a gentle breeze to

get us where we wanted to be we wouldn't know that he had that authority, we wouldn't recognise him for who he is.

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.

Not so completely calm that they couldn't get to their destination. The episode after this at the beginning of chapter 5 tells us they went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.

Water reminds us of life, it reminds us of being right in God's presence and it reminds us of hope.

Life because we all need water to drink.

Being right in God's presence because of the symbolism of washing in baptism

But also being right in God's presence for the same reason as it reminds us of hope and that is because he is also in the boat. We may be all at sea but we're all in the same boat and we're all in the same boat with Jesus who commands the sea.

The end of Jonah chapter 2 demonstrates the reality and the certainty of his hope:

Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah up on the beach, and it did.

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

And as the Psalmist put it in Psalm 107 that we used in our prayers earlier:
He calmed the raging storm,
 and the waves became quiet.
They were glad because of the calm,
 and he brought them safe to the port they wanted.
Let us that the Lord for his goodness
 for the wonderful things he does for us.

So we long for the water and we long for Jesus' presence, to know his
presence in the boat and to sing his praise for all the wonderful things that
he has done:

You alone are my strength, my shield,

...

and I long to worship you.

Be still and know that I am God
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Amen.