Westlake Church Lausanne

Lord over Storms, Lord over Darkness
Matthew 8:23-34

Because of Mark's death this is going to be a different message to the one I'd planned.

The context of this passage is that a great crowd has formed around Jesus because of his miracles. But rather than play to the crowd, Jesus heads for the exit, and leaves by boat with his disciples, to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Lord Over the Storm
Verses 23-24, 'And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there was a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves.' So the disciples follow Jesus into the boat, and into a storm.

Just think about that for a moment. That tells us something, doesn't it: that when you follow Jesus you may still face stuff that you wish you never had to face, that you can go through circumstances that you would not wish on anyone. That you can be very close to Jesus, and he can be very close to you, in fact he can be sitting right next to you in the confined quarters of a boat, and things can still get very nasty, and you can still be hit by a storm.

I don't know if you have ever been in a boat, during a storm, but it's scary. Some years back when she was little, I took Naomi, my eldest daughter sailing in our little dinghy on the lake. All summer we had paddled around, becalmed, with no wind, and then one afternoon the wind finally got up, so I decided to show Naomi what sailing was really like. And she had a blast, and I was terrified, as the waves kept washing over us, and I was trying to calmly tell her to bail the water out faster, as I realised that I was right at the limit of my ability, and about to cross it.

And in Jesus' boat there are experienced fishermen, like Peter and Andrew and James and John, who know this lake, but they also know that they have crossed the line. This storm is like nothing they've experienced. And sometimes life is like that isn't it? It takes you beyond what you think you can endure. And this storm appears to have come from nowhere, and for no reason. And when that happens, when you can't explain it, it makes it all the harder.

And where is Jesus whilst all this is going on? Where is he when it seems like they are about to die? Is he bailing the water out with his friends? Is he manning the oars to try and get to land? Is he reefing the sail? No. Verse 24, 'he was asleep.' And there are times, times when death is close, times when it seems that all around you hell is breaking loose, times when you are being hit by a storm and you have done nothing wrong, you are this close to Jesus, and yet it seems as though God is indifferent, or even asleep.

And these men are afraid of dying, and so they wake him, saying, v25, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And Jesus' response? "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Why are they afraid?! They're about to drown Jesus! They're about to go

under. They're about to be consumed by this storm. And *little faith*? The very reason they've woken you is because they have faith in you, because they think you can make a difference!

So why does Jesus say what he says? Well, for a couple of reasons at least. Firstly, because fear comes when we think, whether we are conscious of it or not, that this situation is greater than God. That I'm on my own, and that I'm going to drown in this storm.

But secondly, because while they clearly believe that he has the *power* to save them, what they don't fully grasp is his *person*, and his *purpose*. They don't yet get who he really is, or why he has come: that he cannot be lost in the storm until he has completed the task his Father has sent him to do.

Verse 26, 'Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea and there was a great calm.' And with a word, the howling winds became the softest of breezes; and the smashing of waves became the gentle lapping of the lake against the hull. It's no wonder, that as he brings order out of chaos, they ask, v27, "What sort of man is this?" What sort of man is he? He is the Lord of all creation, who holds in his hands the lives of everyone of us.

You see, in the Old Testament, it's God who has the power over the winds and the waves. And here is Jesus, with power over the storm. So whilst these men call him Lord, they have just discovered something more of what that means. And whilst this storm terrified them, they have just discovered that Jesus is greater than the worst thing they can ever face in life.

Sometime back Su read a book on parenting and one thing she shared with me has stuck with me – and that is just how many of our decisions as parents are based on fear – fear of what might happen if we let our kids do this, fear of what others might think if we let them do that. And it's not just decisions about parenting that fear can affect. Fear for our future can haunt us, just as fear for their future, in the face of this storm, caused their panic. But Christ is greater than your fear, and he is greater than the storms of life that make us fear. And you can trust him when you go through such times, because of his power, and his person and his purposes.

And when you trust him like that, it's him who brings about that great calm, that inner peace, that sense of poise that we all need in the eye of the storm.

But if the storm tells us the power of Christ over chaos and over nature, the episode that immediately follows tells us something else.

Lord Over Darkness
Verse 28, 'And when he came to the other side… two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.'

So here are two men whose lives have been destroyed by the powers of darkness. And as they emerge from the tombs, they're like dead men walking. But it's not only their lives that are damaged, is it? Matthew tells us that they cast a shadow over the whole surrounding area – no-one would pass that way for fear of them. It is a terrible picture of the destructive power that the forces of darkness exert over people, and the disintegration of lives that they bring.

And we don't know how these men ended up there, do we? Matthew doesn't tell us their stories, even if he knew them. Was this the end result of sin, sin that at the start seemed so attractive, until they were hooked, and broken and discarded? Matthew doesn't tell us. Whatever it was, for these men it ends in a graveyard. It's the place where satan wants everyone's story to end.

Is there no one who can turn it around?

Yes. There is. There is one man. And unlike everyone else, Jesus doesn't avoid going that way. Instead, Jesus steps out of the boat and he steps into this world of graves and death and darkness and disintegration. And he does so to bring life and light and healing and wholeness.

Just look at how the demons respond to his arrival: v29, 'They cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"'

Now, did you see that? – 'what have *you* to do with *us*?' The demons know what we can so often forget, that there is no common ground between Jesus and darkness, between Jesus and sin, between Jesus and the place of death. It's why they hate him so. And they recognise who he is, the Son of God, walking into their graveyard; and he has come much sooner than they feared. They knew their time to destroy was limited, they knew that one day the time would come when their power would be broken, but they thought that was up ahead. And here he is, the Son of God, entering the tombs, to master them.

And they beg Jesus to be allowed to go into the pigs instead, and with a word of command from Jesus, "Go", they go, and the herd is drowned in the sea. But lest you worry about the pigs, the story isn't about the pigs, is it? It's about this Man who stands among the tombs, who stands among all this death and darkness and broken lives, this man before whom demons flee, this man who brings life and wholeness with a word.

What are you supposed to do with such a man? Well, look what the herdsmen and the town do. Verse 33, 'The herdsmen fled'. Verse 34, 'All the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.' Don't they welcome him? No they don't. Don't they thank him for delivering these men? No. Don't they reward him and honour him for this public, civic act of

decency that has made their area safe? No, there are no rewards for Jesus. They ask him to leave. It seems they were more concerned about their economic loss of these pigs, than of seeing lives transformed. Sometimes we prioritise the wrong things, don't we?

So how can our response be different? What can help us follow him rather than flee from him, or ask him to leave? What can help people of little faith like us, trust him when the storm hits?

A Love that Transforms

Just before Jesus got into the boat a scribe came to Jesus and told him, v19, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Wherever and whatever life throws at me, I'm yours Jesus. And in response Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (v20).

Don't you think that's a funny thing to call yourself? The Son of Man? Where does he get that from? Well, in the Old Testament, in Daniel 7, the prophet Daniel sees a vision of a heavenly being, a man like no other man, who stands beside the throne of God, and to whom dominion and power and glory are given, and who every nation and every people will serve, and whose kingdom and power will endure forever. And Jesus is saying, I am that divine man – the Son of Man. But in the psalms and the prophets that title is also used to describe humanity in all our frailness and weakness and brokenness. And here is Jesus saying, I am *the* Son of Man, and I have come as the son of man. And the Son of Man, the Son of God humbled himself and came and entered our broken world, this place of death and darkness, and took on our frail humanity. And he left his home, he put aside his comfort, he exchanged the adulation of angels, to enter the chaos and the darkness of our world and our lives.

And in the midst of the storm the disciples cry out to Jesus to save them. And yet the reason they did not need to fear was because that was exactly why Jesus had come – to save them, and us. And that boat could never go down until he had done that task, and he did it by going to the cross.

And at the cross, he threw himself into the storm of God's wrath against sin, so that we might enjoy that great calm, that true peace, peace with God, and peace within ourselves. And whilst here he dismisses the demons with a word, at the cross he died at the hands of darkness, and allowed the darkness to engulf him. And he entered the graveyard for us, not as a visitor, but as a victim, and they laid him in a tomb. And he became the dead, so that you and I might become the living. But death could not hold the one who said he was the resurrection and the life, and through his cross and his resurrection from the dead the apostle Paul tells us Jesus made a public spectacle of the powers, forever triumphing over them.

And it's knowing the measure of Christ's love for you – that he would do all that for you - that can transform your heart so you want to follow him, whatever the storms of life, because no storm compares to the one he endured for you. And it's knowing the measure of his love for you at the cross that can transform your heart from one of fear, to one of trust and hope, because the Son of Man, and the Son of God, died for you. And neither death nor dark powers can stand against him.