

Calming the Storm!

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[0 : 0 0] What happens when it seems their lives are going to be turned upside down? Well, I think about a crew off Reunion Island in the Atlantic. Their ship, when adriftless, there was engine failure, and it was picked up by a typhoon, and a large storm threw the boat onto the rocks.

Luckily, the crew were rescued from their vessel, but they bore the scars of trauma for a long time. Or I think about various seas-faring communities along the Black Sea that have been devastated by the recent war.

The iron boats from Israel or Gaza, but they're just trying to do their jobs, but they're caught up in the middle of it. Or there are those who are going through the most dangerous parts of the Red Sea, facing missile attacks from the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, launching missiles, armed drones, shipping, demanding an end to the invasion of Gaza.

It takes a big ship two days to travel through the most dangerous part of the Red Sea. Thousands of seafaders do that journey every single week. They can't go out faster. They can't outrun a missile.

And if they see it coming, they just have to wait to see if it hits them. And it can be the worst 48 hours of a seafader's life. And attacks on ships are up 475%, and already the lives of numerous innocent seafaders have been lost.

[1 : 2 2] And in today's reading, the disciples are also facing great difficulties. They think that their lives are about to be turned upside down, and it would be, but just not in the way they might think.

In this story of Jesus calming the storm, it's repeated in Mark's Gospel and Luke's, as well as what we read in Matthew's Gospel. And they're all accounts of the same story, giving us three different perspectives of what was going on.

And on this Sea Sunday, as we've spent some time thinking about the work of seafaders, how they give their lives to serve and to work so tirelessly on all sorts of different bezels, and those who support them in various ways, I wonder if our hearts will be moved to the one who can turn our lives upside down for his good, and for our good also, for his glory, as the one who calms the storms of our lives by bringing his presence, his peace, and his power.

And by him, we need Jesus. And so as we reflect on this passage, I saw this video come up over the weekend of the public figure Russell Brand, which has gone pretty viral on the internet.

He's had quite the journey over the last eight months or so. Early this year, he officially converted to Christianity. In April, he was baptized in the river Thames by Bear Grylls, and there were a few others there and around.

[2 : 4 6] And this weekend, he was interviewed at an event in America, and this is what he shared about his faith. He said, Christ chooses us. We have been chosen. I wish I had known earlier.

I wish I hadn't thought I was too clever for the religion of my grandmothers. I thought I was too smart. I thought somehow that I knew what was in the Bible without actually reading it. You know, I get the idea, angels, Jesus.

Reading this, though, reading the Bible actually for myself is blowing my mind on a daily basis. I cannot believe the profundity, the depth, the incredible beauty, the truth available to all of us.

It's transforming me very quickly. That's surely someone whose life is being transformed by Jesus. But I wonder if his thoughts echo ours.

You know, we might be familiar with this story. It's a good Sunday school story. Jesus calms the storm. He still be quiet when we're acted out. We remember it. We know that Jesus gets into his boat with his disciples.

[3 : 43] The furious storm comes. The waves are so large. The boat's being swept over. And Jesus is all fast asleep and snug. And his disciples are fearful. They wake him up and they're pleading with him.

He said, Hey, lost master, don't you care that we're going to drown? And Jesus asks, why they've got such little faith? Why they're so afraid? And he rebukes the wind and the waves and it's all calm. That's really the story.

And we're done. You know, that's this sermon over. But actually, the more we dig deep into what the story says, who it reveals Jesus to be, the more we engage with it, we do see that actually, Russell Brand is right.

It's truth that's available to all of us. It's transformative. It's deep. It's profound. And it's exactly what happens when we actually engage seriously with the claims of Jesus, that he is who he says he is, that his identity is, that he is the son of God, and that he is the power to do whatever he likes, whenever he likes, with whoever he likes.

And we, like Russell Brand, can encounter the presence of Jesus and ask him to speak to us through the pages of the Bible. But, you know, there can be times that we become familiar.

[4 : 51] It's like hanging out with someone, and, well, we become just, oh, there they are right next to me. But when we're around Jesus and being around him, we find that actually, if we come to engage him as he is, we find that he's life-altering, he's transformative.

And this is at the crux of this story for the disciples. They've forgotten who Jesus was. They'd seen various miracles. In fact, throughout this chapter, chapter 8 of Matthew's Gospel, he's been healing people, and he's been raising the dead, and he's been teaching these amazing things.

He's been calling people to follow him, and the cost that involves. And after this story, he would heal a demon-possessed man, he would heal that paralyzed man.

Jesus has authority in this story over nature, and then over demons, and then over the sick. He has authority over all. And just like Israel, when they were in the wilderness, Jesus expected his disciples to take charge of the storm himself, sorry, take charge of the storm themselves, without having to wake him, and to trust that being in his presence was enough.

It was as simple as that. It really does come back to being in Sunday school. Trust Jesus, boys and girls. His presence is enough. And when they got into the boat, Jesus' powerful and peaceful presence is with them, even as the storms come.

[6 : 13] And as Charles Spurgeon put it, well, in the boat with Jesus is a happy place, but storms may come, even when we're there.

And for us today, we can know that Jesus is not some domesticated type of Jesus where, you know, he's just there, but actually, the very real presence of Jesus is real help from a real God for real people in real life situations that he can transform us in profound ways, that he can come to demonstrate his presence, his peace, his power.

He brings his presence to us in order to comfort us, in order to strengthen us, in order to uphold us. He's a friend who sticks closely with a brother. He's the saviour, who's a miracle working God, and he's the Messiah who comes to save his people.

And he's here with you and me today, and he's willing to meet us whatever we're at, whatever journey we're on with him. And the question we can ask ourselves is, are we ready to meet with him?

Are we ready to engage with the claims that he makes about himself? And do we need to know his presence and his peace and his power in our lives? You see, when we come to this story, there's all sorts of busyness in the life of Jesus.

[7 : 26] As I just said, he's been restoring too deep, sorry, he's been speaking to people about the cost of following him. There was the, many people that he healed, the man with leprosy, the faith of the centurion, and all sorts of things that are happening in Matthew's gospel here.

But what we find that Matthew is driving home to us is that Jesus is actually a homeless saviour. He is, there's no place for him. He's a bit out of place actually.

And he had just said to the scribe who asked about following him, what's the cost of following him? He said, well, foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.

But now, what we find is that Jesus gets on a boat and he does lay down his head. And we find that the tired son of man peacefully puts his trust in his father and the light of the world is out like a light and they go out and we, Jesus might be mindful of Psalm 3, 5 where it says, I lay down and slept, I woke again for the Lord to save me.

And Jesus has his full trust in his heavenly father to provide for his needs and to take care of him even in sleep, even as there a storm comes about. This sort of approach wasn't the same for Hebrew folk who were mainly landlubbers and this might surprise us in some way because many of the stories in the Gospels are around sea, the Sea of Galilee and I have been to the Sea of Galilee and it's quite beautiful and it's really peaceful, it's really still.

[8 : 55] The Hebrew folk were mainly landlubbers even though four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen and the sea represented to Jews the forces of chaos and confusion.

They're reminded when Moses went through the Red Sea and the sea was parted and it represents chaos and confusion that the sea is actually an agent of judgment and only God could control the sea and the devil that's within it.

So we've got that view of what the sea is that when God judged the world that he's reversing the process through the flood and Noah and the flood, remember that story also from Sunnusco, but Israel, they were different.

Their view was, although they were landlubbers as a whole, that they worshipped the God who created the seas and the same God who would say in Psalm 104, you set a boundary they cannot cross, never again will they cover the earth.

And so, they would go out and fish in the Loch of Galilee, it says they're the Sea of Galilee but it's actually a loch really and they're well aware of the power of the storm but also God's control over the storm and so this is why we find that Jesus is full of peace and calm not only because he is the Lord of all but because he has his full trust that God has control, his Father in heaven has control over the sea.

[10 : 13] He knew that being at rest with him was the best place to be and that's what he entrusted to his disciples. And Jesus, we read in the Bible, is peace personified. He's called the Prince of Peace and he is able to bring his peace to us in a variety of ways.

He's able to bring peace into our lives at any given time. And life at sea always brings its threat of storms. And for seafarers, every day, they face personal mental health storms as well of isolation and depression and together they've also faced the fear of nature's most violent weather.

There are all sorts of storms that seafarers face as well as ourselves. And that's why we're thankful that we can have a side a day like the Sea Sunday and for the Seafader Centre here and all throughout the world for the Sailor Society providing such a wide spectrum of services to our seafarers whether it's chaplaincy and spiritual guidance to welfare support, access to education and financial help for those in desperate need, whether it's extending a hand of friendship, hospitality and pastoral care.

So all we come through the doors and practical help to connect, practical help to enable those who are at sea to connect with loved ones at home. In other words, what the seafarers do and what the Sailor Society do across the world is to bring the peace of Jesus and to bring that readily available peace which is readily available to us here gathered too.

Whatever we're going through, whatever we might be facing, Jesus is the one who we can go to and as we go to him we receive his peace afresh. We can bask in his peace, we can be at rest in his peace even if there's a storm going on in our lives.

[11 : 55] And we know that life is so busy and there's more distractions than ever before all around us. But in Jesus we can take time to come aside and to be with him and to know his peace, to have that peace in our hearts and to experience that peace as we go about our days consistently in every season of life.

I wonder if you and I need to experience this peace afresh today. I know I do and I know that life gets so busy and before I know it it's tea time already, a day is gone and I've not known that peace.

But then to take some time aside even just for a short time every day and just to know the peace of Jesus in our lives. And so as we reflected upon Jesus' presence being with his disciples, Jesus' peace being available to them and we finally close with the power of Jesus that he's awoken from his slumber and then he demonstrates his power.

The disciples wake him up and Jesus says, right, see the sea, this far and no further, you're done, I say so. The boundary of the line is here and Jesus demonstrates his power even over nature and he's fully in control of this situation.

He rebukes the wind, he calms the storm, he controls the evil seen inside the sea and he demonstrates his divinity. And he's been inviting his disciples to do this, to take hold of it, but instead they respond in fear.

[13 : 18] And they fear for their lives but Jesus reveals his great power and now actually they find, we find in the passage that they're even more fearful, they're amazed, they're even more fearful that as he rebuked the winds and the waves they asked, what kind of man is this?

Even the winds and the waves obey him. And so they're filled with great fear and that's what it says in Mark's Gospel that they're amazed and they're filled with great fear. And this is a different kind of fear, it's not a fearing for your life that we're about to die and the ship's about to capsize, it's a holy and godly and righteous kind of fear of the one who holds creation together and who has authority, complete authority over nature as well as over any crisis that we might face as we follow him.

But Jesus is also fulfilling a psalm's prophecy what it says in Psalm 107, then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he brought them out of their distress.

Jesus is willing, readily able to help in any situation that we might be going through. And so in closing then, last Sunday I asked the question, why do you and I come to church?

Why do we bother coming to church? And what's our focus for this church? What's church all about? What does church mean for you and me? And this week I want to just follow up on that question by thinking, why do we go out and help people?

[14 : 40] I mean, it sounds pretty harsh, but why bother? Why bother helping those who are in need? Why do we go out of our way? Why bother having a special service for the work of the lifeboats and the R&R;?

Why bother having the Savor Society? Why bother having a Harvest Thanksgiving service? Why bother having a service that celebrates the work of tier funds? Why bother?

Well, it is because, as one Christian writer puts it, Christopher Walken, the tradition of charity draws its life from biblical waters.

Now, this isn't for Christians that suddenly get all arrogant. Look at how charitable we are. It's not about that at all. But it's actually seeing the picture of the Bible and the picture of the early church is that it was Christians who became known and became famous in the Roman society for their care and for the poor and for the outcasts and for those whom society looked down on.

And to give an example of this, there's a letter in Antiquity where the Roman officials are saying, wow, look at these Christians and look at how they love. I mean, see the babies that have died suddenly and there's widows left to care for them.

[15 : 53] Just leave them be. Just tell them, get on with it. Get over it. It's done. But actually, it's the counter-cultural way of the kingdom of God and the way of living for Jesus that caused Christians to respond to all sorts of needs and made them stand out.

It was charity and it was love at the heart of the Christian faith. And the writer there, Christopher Watkin, goes on to put it like this, that one distinctively Christian aspect is the culture of international aid.

Cultures that are marked by the ethic of God's kingdom show a disproportionate concern for those with whom they have no natural ties, such as the victims of distant natural disasters or oppression.

And so what we find is that our instincts, our natural instincts to help people, our natural common sense values that we know so well in the Western world that we take for granted that they're inherently Christian values, that they've been shaped by the Christian faith.

And we help because we've seen that Christ helps. We help because Christ has helped us. We help because our lives can be and have been turned upside down.

[17 : 01] And we help because Jesus has the power to transform lives. We help because Jesus and his presence and his power and his peace make all the difference. And so Sea Sunday not only highlights the needs of our seafeders, it also allows us to learn about how many of those needs are being answered.

And that we too are called to help to calm the storm. That God is with us even in the middle of a storm. That he's with the seafeders on their ships. He's with their families back home.

He's with the Sailor Society and the Seafeders Centre here in all their work. And as we reflect on this work, both here and in Bergogorne and throughout the world, we thank God for all those who serve. For the seafeders that bring us almost everything that we buy and use, whether it's cars, phones, clothes, food, that all come by sea from other countries.

For the seafeders who can be at sea for months at a time. Some working on the decks and all weather. Others as officers bringing a bridge staff overseeing the navigation from port to port.

Others still engineers maintaining and running the huge engines that power these vessels. Many challenges such as low wages, long hours, and separation from family, which you'll hear a bit more about when he comes to share.

[18 : 14] But we thank God at this time for answer prayers, for the practical and pastoral support offered by many, and for our own seafeders society, for Drew and Liz and all that they do, for John and for Murdo and Mary and for Donnie and for Sylvia, for all those who help as part of that and who offer assistance in various ways.

We thank God for them all. And as Jesus was able to demonstrate his power, peace and presence among his disciples, then as we reflected with the children earlier, that his authority has been given from his identity as God's one and only son.

And that authority has been given to us to be a blessing as followers of Jesus. That we, as we experience his peace through the storms of life, that we can know that not only is he with us, that we in ourselves, even when we're in a storm, that he will enable us to be that blessing and to bring Jesus authority.

But the question we ask, just to close off, is that are our feet finally fixed on the name of Jesus? And do we trust in his powerful name or other times, or are we in this moment wavering?

Let's be aware that we can come to him and we can bring all our struggles and our strains, we can bring all our celebrations, all our daily, everyday, ordinary moments, and we can bring them under his authority and under his name.

[19 : 33] As we do so, we're bringing in for his glory and see how he works through us in every area of our lives. Amen. Amen.