

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

What stories come to mind when you hear this one about Jesus being asleep in the back of the boat during a raging storm? By the way ... don't think it can't be done ... during my time in the service I developed the ability to sleep anywhere ... in the back of an APC bouncing across the tundra, in the back of a helicopter, or even on one occasion while carrying a pack doing a route march ... I was embarrassed to discover this when we came to a corner in the road ... I kept going straight ahead into the tussock (thank goodness it was night-time and very few other people saw that it was me). So, what other stories come to mind?

Noah's journey in the Ark with the animals; Jonah being tossed overboard in the midst of the storm to save the rest of the crew; perhaps even Paul's being shipwrecked off the coast of Crete? What is it about our story that brings others to mind? Are there commonalities in the message or the metaphor? Is it the power of Jesus to control even the waves and the wind? Is it the protection we enjoy as followers of Christ when we endure the tribulations of daily life and the elements? Or is it something else? Truth be told, it's a little of all of these things and a little of something else. This is one of the few stories that are told in various ways in each of the Synoptic Gospels; while some details differ depending on the points each author is trying to make ... the key elements are recognisably similar.

Some commentators have made much of the fact that on this occasion "several other boats" went along with them, they suggest that Jesus wasn't just the captain of His ship here, He was the admiral of the fleet! But for me, that takes the metaphor a little far. Others at various times have questioned Jesus' apparent lack of care for His disciples'

welfare, or the disciples' wonder at the power of Jesus in controlling the wind and the waves. Given that boats are often seen as a metaphor for the church and the storms it endures, these stories do raise some interesting questions. But again, it seems to me that these messages stray a little in the telling.

There are however, a couple of other points worth making. The first is that this journey was about "getting to the other side of the lake" ... to the area of the Decapolis, an area occupied mainly by Gentiles. Jesus and His disciples were headed *across the sea*, that great morass of uncertainty and foreboding menace, away from the relative comfort of Capernaum and friendly territory, *into the spiritual wilderness* ... they were setting out to do God's work well beyond the edge. How is that different from what we are all still called to do?

Note also that Jesus came 'as He was' ... no special clothes or equipment; no lifejacket or flotation device ... while several of His disciples were previously fishermen and might quite naturally dress differently or make special preparations for a night journey across the sea ... *Jesus did not*. I think we can make a reasonable assumption that the weather wasn't terrible before they left. While Jesus probably knew what was about to happen with the weather, it is highly unlikely that the professional fishermen did, or they would have advised Him against it if they suspected that their lives would be in peril. So, the stage is set; our little band, come as they are, are setting out on a journey into the dark and potentially dangerous unknown, to do as they are bid ... in faith. Again, how does this differ from our situation today?

When they wake Jesus, in fear of their lives being lost, they seem to be criticised for their lack of faith? But what changed to bring that faith into question? What did they expect Him to say or do? Was Jesus telling them off for waking Him, or was He instead, making a point about how they chose to define success or failure, and how irrelevant that really was?

In the two parables immediately prior to this story, we hear about seeds growing in the ground “all by themselves” and about the sower “not knowing how it all happens” but knowing when the crop is ready to be harvested and how to go about it. We hear about the mustard seed, “the smallest of all seeds ... growing up” to become a substantially large bush, apparently not to produce mustard, but to provide shelter and comfort for the birds.

Perhaps the message in all of these tales, is one where *the environment* (the weather, what happens around us) and *the outcome* is irrelevant? Because we don't control them. It seems to me that our task ... wherever and whenever we are, is to *live prayerfully and joyfully*, as best we are able; *confident* that we have heard the right message, *sure and certain* that our Lord and Saviour will provide for us and protect us as we go about His work, *irrespective* of what happens to us along the way. *We do not define success or failure ... we serve* at His pleasure doing His will, in His time, for His glory ... *without knowing* what comes next, or when, or why.

The logistician in me sometimes finds these thoughts very scary indeed ... but I have very recently experienced both the real threat and the true joy of the unexpected. Baby Lachlan's arrival reminds me that every single live human birth, at whatever time in gestation cycle *is a miracle*. Only a few years ago many of us may have experienced premature births that were not as successful. I can only imagine the hurt that the parents and grandparents felt then.

It's at times like this that I remember the message in my DVD *The Potter* ... “*here is my stake in the ground ... this is what I believe ... nothing that happens to me will ever change that ... nothing that happens to me can take away my faith or my salvation.*” Irrespective of what happens ... to the boat, to the disciples, to the seeds, or to us here in Geraldine ... we each *choose* to believe, to serve Him, to put our stake in the ground ... we will be His and He will be ours.

Amen.