

The storm at sea is one of the strange Gospel stories which seem to break the mould of literature. It's unusually intimate: we aren't told stories like this about Julius Caesar, let alone a group of Galilean fishermen and their rabbi. When you remember all the incident and emotion that ran through the minds and hearts of the Roman Empire on that day in the world's history, why have we settled on the fate of one small boat in a contrary wind on a negligible lake?

On the other hand, because Jesus of Nazareth is dear to us and we have taken him as our Lord, this story has come to be important for us. We know that any incident of his life would have been significant and revealing, because he lived at the frontier between the world we know and the divine world.

The fishermen have reached that threshold in their own way: they have come to the end of their seamanship, and that means they are staring death in the face. Suddenly our emotions are engaged in this incident, so distant in time and place; because we have all felt the limits of our powers to change things for the better, our power to save ourselves from threat. We know what they are going through, and it is universal: it is a place all mankind has come to know at last, because all of us are mortal.

So the story is about how we perform when we come to the end of our powers.

It isn't a place we want to go to. We love to feel competent and sufficient; we tend to exercise our powers to avoid the experience of failure or impotence. We carefully stay away from the edge of the precipice; but we all know it is there, and we all sense that one day it will get us. It's part of being human. But prayer can raise us above humanity.

It is quite a surreal fact that the Lord himself has purloined a cushion, and has quietly gone to sleep in the stern. He is an image of serenity, whilst everyone else is losing it.

The wakening of Jesus is rude and rough. It is surprising that the sailors - whose milieu this is - have lost their grip, while Jesus - the landlubber - stays calm. As soon as he awakes, however, he takes command of the situation very readily. His commands to the sea and the wind (*Calm down, be silent*) are exactly the same as the commands he has previously given to evil spirits possessing people. The *great calm* which comes is exactly like the *great wind* which had threatened them.

The disciples respond, not with the expected relief, but with *fear*; their question (*Who can this be?*) has its own answer in Scripture: God made sea and wind, and is their sole master; the power of Jesus is the power of God.

This dreamlike narrative is of universal relevance. If we choose to ignore the limitations of our life, never ask questions about how we are to cope with the uncomfortable truths we know are all about us, the only result is that we shall live in unspeakable fear. Fear is throughout the Gospel in opposition to faith and love. Jesus is addressed in the Gospel by the word *didaskaloi*, "teacher": presumably Mark's Greek choice for *Rabbi*. We awaken Jesus in our prayer, in our fearful thought about the meaning of our life, and in that dark and difficult place, *he teaches us* how to have faith, even amidst the realities we know have the power to blot us out. The Gospel is telling us that, even in the most appalling experiences, Jesus has the power to teach us an even more powerful faith in him. We need to know this for ourselves, and to help others who reach the end of earthly and human resources, that there is a voice in God that can calm the sea, and silence the wind: because

*the sea is his, for he made it: and the dry land, shaped by his hand.*