

Today's readings are full of disaster. Today's newspapers have their usual share of disaster. So we should accept the Gospel as illumination for the experience we are passing through. If it were a picture of beautiful morality and a lot of pious principles about the good life, we should rightly call it trivial. Jesus coming to the earth had about it no element of the trivial. He confronted with complete honesty the real experience of being alive and human. But in every situation we find him differing from those around him in his experience.

He does not stop at feelings or appearances; he penetrates these impressive outward perceptions, and addresses the heart of what is happening: he goes beyond the facts, to the truth. Think of his words to Jairus in Mk, when the messengers tell him *Your daughter is dead*: his terse instruction to the father at the very moment of his devastation: *No fear, only faith*. (Surely Jairus must have felt his heart breaking.) He goes on to say: *She is not dead, but sleeping*. (They laughed at him.) When he says *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand* we listen incredulously, and keep our hands on our wallets. But for all that, *truth has been proved faithful by her children in every generation*.

So the storm at sea breaks upon the boat, and Jesus is asleep. It is confidence when we can sleep, saying *I lie down to rest, and sleep comes at once: for you O Lord uphold me in safety*. Nevertheless we find ourselves constantly rising early and going later to rest because we are anxious about so many things, when only one is necessary.

The storm is real enough; and the justice of God is the realest thing of all: in spite of every human crime and dereliction, the justice of God is inexorable and certain, and will have its way when all is done. But there is something else which is just as real: the mercy of God, which makes room in the world for the just and the unjust - people and deeds. We look on, and decide that on the basis of appearance, the justice of God is irrelevant, that we had better take up the sword and correct the world according to our best lights, since God seems to have lost interest in us and our deeds. If there is justice in God, we feel, it is merely theoretical; like an indulgent grandfather, he has fallen asleep, or has forgotten how to punish.

We should remind ourselves that in God there is no alteration, nor shadow of a change; and that unlike us God is simple, is absolutely one with himself. We find our feelings changing all the time, and we find the qualities of our character struggling within us for supremacy; our will for peace is conquered by our desire for revenge: our thirst for justice obliterated by our longing for repose. In God it is never like that. If God is merciful, it is because it fulfils his justice to be merciful; if God wreaks justice, it is out of his love for the oppressed. All that is in God is held together in eternal peacefulness; and when the Bible describes the obliteration of Sodom, it is concerned to give as its result:

*Thus it was that when God destroyed the cities of the plain,
he kept Abraham in mind,
and rescued Lot out of disaster
when he overwhelmed the towns where he lived.*