

## St James Church Alderholt

### Holy Communion 20<sup>th</sup> June 21 – 3<sup>rd</sup> after Trinity

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

Sermon: Answer the Questions

Opening Prayer:

Father God, may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to understand more of the living Word, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I'm sure you must have noticed how often Jesus used a boat or was at the lakeside during his ministry; but that shouldn't surprise us because most of his 3-year ministry took place in the region of Galilee where many of his disciples made their living as fishermen or in related trades.

We also find amazing water-related stories in the O.T: Noah's Ark and Jonah in the belly of the whale, to name just two; and in the New Testament, Acts chapter 27 tells the story of how Paul and his companions were shipwrecked on Malta. Today, however, we have this story – it may be short in length but it's BIG in content.

It's BIG because it's the first occasion in the gospels where Jesus gave a direct command to nature.

It's BIG because it's the first time we hear any of the disciples addressing Jesus directly.

And its BIG because it contains three BIG questions that are my focus for my sermon today:

The first is – “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?”

The second is – “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

And the third – “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey

him!”

Throughout our lives we encounter many important milestones and questions and some of the earliest questions arise when children face the GCSE and A level public examinations. Summer is the exam term for young people in schools, and as a teacher preparing them for exams, I always emphasised that good technique can make the difference of a grade or more, so they should ensure they read the questions carefully before attempting to answer them. That sounds like pretty obvious advice and I’m not going to dwell on it now, but let’s read those three BIG questions again and make some attempt at answering them.

The first – “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” arose when the weather suddenly changed and the sea became very turbulent. Being experienced fishermen, the disciples were aware of how quickly a storm could brew up on waters such as the Sea of Galilee; but it seems their past experiences were forgotten and they got into a panic – but why?

As close followers of Jesus, the disciples had come to know him well and had witnessed him performing many miracles for people in need. I suggest that they had formed unrealistic expectations of how he would sort out all their problems too, so instead of relying on their past experience of stormy seas and getting on with their business of managing the boat, they expected Jesus to get them out of difficulty. Jesus, however, was fast asleep and obviously not at all concerned for their safety, so they panicked – woke Jesus up in the middle of the storm and shouted at him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” It didn’t occur to them to follow the example of Jesus and let the wind blow itself out. “Do something – NOW” they shouted. How often do we do that today – expecting Jesus to do something that we could and should do for ourselves or for others. Jesus answered their first question with both words and actions: presumably to demonstrate to them who he really was – there was no pacifying talk, just action. “Quiet! Be still!” he commanded. Immediately the wind died down and the water was completely calm. The disciples looked at each other in amazement then, in the

stillness of the moment he broke the silence with a clear and direct rebuke, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

As disciples today, perhaps we should ask ourselves that same question. In our moments of anxiety or fear do we have the sort of faith that Jesus is demanding here. I do not believe he’s saying, “Look, you are with me, you will never get hurt.” But he is echoing the ancient teachings of scripture in which God promises that his presence will always give us peace.

A peace that will give us the strength and courage to deal with all that life throws at us.

A peace that will enable us to ask God for the right things in our prayers.

A peace like that in Psalm 118 vs 16:

“The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

Perhaps though, our weak faith lets us down in difficult times and, forgetting the presence of God – we panic.

That rebuke caused the disciples to respond with their final mystified question – not to Jesus, but to each other:

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” What were they hoping for or expecting he would do when they woke him up? Whatever their expectation, they couldn’t have anticipated his response – which prompted the question, “Who is this?”

Who indeed? On the face of it this seems a rather pointless question, one to which we assume they should have known the answer. Or, maybe they had suddenly realised what they had let themselves in for.

It must have been exciting being in the presence of a person with such huge charisma; following this radical preacher around; seeing him perform miracles and hearing him teach about the Kingdom of God.

I wonder if it was really necessary for Jesus to actually calm the storm, it may have ceased as quickly as it arose – but his action must have been very impressive and it saved a lot of words. We

might have expected Jesus to follow up with something like, “Now, remind me – what was your question?”

So, Jesus answered the BIG questions with actions rather than words – and we can quite often do the same, rather than wait unrealistically for a miracle solution. Resolving our problems may well be within our ability, but we should always pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit and look to the example set by Jesus as we place our trust in him.

I haven't attempted to answer the disciples' last question, “Who is this?” because this is the BIG question that each of us should daily be asking ourselves. It can't be answered by simply learning a glib definition, but by coming to know Jesus through our experiences of life and by forming our answer in our mind, our heart and our soul. And as we try to answer it, we need to guard against trying to make Jesus fit our pattern – rather, it is US who need to fit HIS pattern. May it always be so. Amen.