

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February

Who is this that even the winds obey him?

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-end

Revelation 4

Luke 8:22-25

My guess is that most of you would have seen the film of *The Sound of Music* – and if you are like me you've seen it a number of times and can probably join in the words of most of the songs. Perhaps you've even been to one of those sing-a-long evenings.

You may recall the incident just after Maria (Julie Andrews) joins the Von Trapp household. She has been introduced to the children and has had to endure a somewhat formal supper which shows her well how things are organised. It's now the middle of the night, she is in her room alone while a storm rages outside. One by one the 7 children sneak into her room, afraid of the wind and the rain, needing comfort and seeking reassurance. And she launches into singing "these are a few of my favourite things".

Storms can be frightening. Maybe we have our own stories of when we have been scared and sought comfort, or perhaps we have stories of when we have offered comfort and protection to others.

The Sea of Galilee – because of its location and geography – is particularly susceptible to sudden and violent storms. In our gospel reading we have a picture of one such violent storm. But some facts to remember here. The sailors in these boats are not children, likely to be scared by wind and rain. They are not landlubbers, happy to be at sea in calm waters but desperate to be back on land when the waves come. They are experienced fishermen who have spent their lives on this lake. They have been through countless storms. They know how to handle their boats in these waters.

This storm, however, must have been particularly bad as it had them worried – terrified for their very lives. And just as the von Trapp children turned to Maria, these men turned to the one they thought could help them. Jesus. Jesus who seemed unperturbed by the howling gale; Jesus, who was sleeping seemingly oblivious of what was going on.

I wonder what they thought Jesus would do. Perhaps, like the Von Trapp children, they were just looking for comfort and encouragement, for someone

they trusted to be alongside them. But I wonder if they even thought that he could do more – did they think it possible that he might actually change the situation. By their reaction, I sense they were not expecting this.

But we read that he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; and they ceased and there was a calm. We might well join with the disciples as they say ‘Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?’

There are some who would always try to explain miracles away. The feeding miracles, they might say, can be explained by people sharing the food they had brought with them with each other; the exorcisms and healings by a case of the effect of positive thinking; and this nature miracle of the calming of the storm by a coincidence of timing.

But that really won't do. It seems from the story that the whole point of its inclusion is to encourage us to ask and then answer the question the disciples themselves posed – ‘Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?’

The story is followed in the gospel account by an exorcism (the man who lived among the tombs), by a healing (the woman with the haemorrhage) and with the story of Jesus bringing someone back from the dead (Jairus's daughter). We then hear of the disciples going out and doing similar things in Jesus' name

And then Jesus asks the disciples the question they have been asking themselves – who do you say that I am? Peter responds – the Messiah of God. Shortly after this Jesus is affirmed on the Mount of Transfiguration by a voice from heaven – the voice of God himself – This is my Son, my Chosen – listen to him.

All these miracles, all these actions point towards that moment of revelation and affirmation. Jesus is more than a man; he is the chosen one of God, God in human form. If we do away with the miracles, just what are we left with? The miracles point towards the truth of who Jesus is.

Gospel stories are easy to read – even if their meanings go very deep. They can be appreciated on many levels. We can read them many times with new truths emerging each time. But I suspect the book of Revelation – where our New

Testament reading came from this morning - is one we don't often turn to in our own Bible reading.

Here we have John's vision of heaven. The throne of God, with God at the centre of praise and worship and honour. With angels and heavenly beings that we struggle to picture or comprehend worshipping and praising him. A recognition of the holiness and awesomeness of God. God who is worthy to receive our worship and adoration. A reminder of the fact that God created all things, and all things owe their very existence to God.

And the Old Testament reading takes us back to that creation. It's the second of two creation stories included in the Bible. Two stories that each tell us something different about God, and his relationship with the world. Here we have a picture of a God who creates the physical world from nothing, and then creates human beings from the dust of the world he has created. Who creates life itself; who is the origin of it all.

Two readings that illustrate that God is the creator – that everything owes its very being to him. And if by what he does Jesus demonstrates authority over the created world then we are – like those disciples - left with only one conclusion – he is the chosen one of God, God in human form.

In the person of Jesus then heaven and earth meet. The life of God intersects with our ordinary everyday life. And this shows us God's concern for the mundane and the ordinary– for people like you and me.

This is the reason why we can bring to him the things that concern us – the storms and upheavals of our lives, the stresses and pressures that we have to deal with, our hurts and pains; our struggles and our difficulties.

And we will find that just as Jesus met the disciples in their fear on Galilee, he will bring comfort and encouragement to us in our storms. He may not take them away – the calming of the storm as we have seen was about showing who Jesus was – but he will help us face up to them and be alongside us as we do.

This story of the calming of the storm shows us quite clearly that God – the creator of all, worshipped and adored in the heavenly realms – is also the God who is with us in the mess and the muddle of life. Who is the friend alongside us as well as the God who created us.