

Sermon 'If in crisis – look up!'

The Bat Phone

Imagine the scene - you are responsible for running one of the world's biggest cities, and some of the greatest arch criminals of all time are running amok. The police force is baffled, the public are angry, the city in chaos, and you are in a panic. What would you do?

I am of course putting you in the position of a certain commissioner Gordon of Gotham City - and his response in such a scenario was to do one thing - to reach for the Bat Phone.

When Gotham was in crisis, Gordon didn't waste time pretending it wasn't happening — he looked to the Dynamic Duo, because in an emergency, you go to the best help available.

And today's gospel gives us something very similar but much more profound. A crisis. A storm. A moment when panic takes over and the disciples need saving from the life-threatening chaos. The message of this story then is 'If in crisis — look to Jesus.'

Matthew

Matthew describes a very real crisis for the disciples. They are alone in a boat in the early hours of the morning, between 3 and 6am — the time sailors have always known as the most dangerous and unpredictable. And Jesus is not with them. He is up a mountain praying. In Scripture, mountains are places of closeness to God; valleys and choppy waters are places of trouble. The disciples are in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the storm hits. This story appears in three gospels, which tells us it mattered. It was remembered. It was a turning point in how the disciples understood who Jesus really was.

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If we read it symbolically, it's not hard to see ourselves in that boat. Christ ascended, praying for his church and his world; we, his followers, sometimes sailing smoothly, but very often battling storms, doing our best simply to stay afloat. The life of the Church — the whole institution, as well as each of us individually — is sometimes sunny and pleasant, but very often dark and stormy, where we are simply trying not to sink.

It is at the worst moment, the darkest and most dangerous time, that the disciples see Jesus coming towards them. And not in any ordinary way. He is walking on the water. This isn't a divine party trick. It's a sign rooted in the very nature of God. Think back to Genesis: God's Spirit hovering over the waters, bringing calm where there was chaos, life where there was nothingness. Jesus walking on the water is a deliberate echo of creation itself. The One who tamed the primordial deep now treads across the storm to reach his people.

Reaction

The disciples' reaction is fascinating. Matthew says they are terrified. They think he's a ghost. And although that detail may simply be historical — someone really did say this — the sense of *fear* itself is *appropriate*. Throughout Scripture, when human beings find themselves in the presence of God, the instinctive response is awe, fear, being overwhelmed. I sometimes think we've domesticated Jesus, made him too matey and cosy and nice. The historical Jesus was compassionate, yes — absolutely — but also demanding, unsettling, and difficult to grasp. The kind of leader you might respect before you like — perhaps we've all had bosses like that in the past, I know I have.

And Jesus' response confirms their fear: "It is I." In the original: "I am." The divine name. The God of the burning bush. Jesus announces his divinity in the middle of the storm.

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Peter's first response is good. He feels courageous - enough to step out of the boat, into the storm, into the dark, and do the impossible: He walks on water. But then — famously — he stops looking at Jesus and starts looking at the waves. And that is when he begins to sink. So Jesus reaches out his hand and saves him. In that moment Peter must have thought his life was ending, taken by the storm, yet Christ pulls him up.

Crisis

And this is the crux of the story for us today.

When we are in crisis, where do we fix our eyes? For many people, especially in times of illness, bereavement, or deep suffering, faith becomes the thing that sustains them. Not easily — never easily — but faithfully. Keeping our eyes fixed on Christ is how we are pulled up out of the water and given strength to carry on. And Romans reminds us that “the word is near you” — God's saving presence is not distant or hidden, but right at hand, ready to steady us when we call. I am full of admiration for these people and their faith.

But this story speaks beyond our personal lives. It speaks to the wider world.

Every night the news shows us the chaos of our world: war, poverty, political confusion, anxiety over cultural change, humanity unsure of what humanity even is anymore especially with AI. But the greatest crisis — the one I've been saying for years — is our climate. The way humanity is treating our only home. And humanity is dealing with this crisis in so many unhelpful ways. Some deny it altogether — like being in a storm and pretending it's a gentle afternoon pleasure cruise. Others stare only at the waves — content to bail the water out of the boat as it keeps filling up,

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without realising that soon no bucket will be big enough to scoop out the water coming in.

The Church of England has just released an important document, Hope for All Creation, which I've linked on the website.

[hope-for-all-creation-for-web-new.pdf](#)

We'll be exploring creation care more deeply in September. But its central message is clear: in this crisis, our only hope is to look to God. Not because God will magically wipe the problems away — that's not how he works — but because looking to God through Christ reminds us that **he** is Creator and Ruler of the earth - which means humanity is not. We are stewards, not masters.

This is an issue with our very culture. In a society that has largely turned its back on God, or has created God in its own image, where do people look in crisis? If you refuse to believe in God or at least the God of the Bible, it's like the disciples choosing to ignore Jesus in the storm. They would have drowned.

Worship

Matthew though ends the story with worship: "Those in the boat worshipped him." That is the turning point. Not the calm sea. Not the rescue. The worship. Because worship is the moment we acknowledge God as God — and not ourselves, not our land, not our power, not our wealth, not anything and anyone else – not even Batman!

So, our hope, and our prayer, is that all who are in crisis today — whether the personal storms of suffering or the global storms of our age — will look up, and choose to see Christ coming across the waves, and to worship him – to do what we are commanded to do if we want calm from chaos. Because in every crisis, the

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instruction remains the same: look to God — not the waves!
Amen.

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