

## Reflection for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021 2 Corinthians 6.1-13, St Mark 4.35-41



The Sea of Galilee or Sea of Tiberias as it is called in John's Gospel is quite small, as seas go. It is about the same length (11 miles) as Lake Windermere but is much wider being about 8 miles rather than the maximum of just one mile for that Cumbrian lake. In terms of microclimate however it is very particular. It is the second lowest sea in the world – only the Dead Sea, into which its fresh waters flow, is lower. Because it is skirted to the north and east by the Golan heights and to the west by more steep escarpments it can hold its own mild climate. But it is also subject to cold air draining into it suddenly and this may be the cause of the storm which we encounter in today's reading from Mark.

When I was a student I was once caught in a storm on a lake outside Atlanta Georgia. Surrounded by mountains the rain came on suddenly and violently. The air filled with electricity with continuous lightning and thunder all around. It was a very small boat and I was escorting a young lady when the terrifying event happened. The details remain vivid even forty-five years later. Reader, we both survived!

Mark was writing his Gospel probably a little less distant in time than my experience and he was doing so either from the direct eye-witness recollection of Peter or from the well-known story re-told from that source in Mark's church. The details are vivid and the experience of the disciples' terror which was supplanted by awe-filled calm is still tangible. We can see how helpful this episode was in the context of the dramatic storms which surrounded the infant Church of Mark's day. These included the disintegration in chaos of the Jewish state in Jerusalem and the eventual destruction of the Temple. Or, the suspicion and persecution that came to them from the Roman authorities or hostile pagan neighbours. These made this story so treasured by those who read Mark's Gospel, or more often, heard it read to them by Mark or others.

How do we understand this miracle of the calming of the sea? We might look at other storms of our own times and once more realise that we are a small community in a sometimes hostile or disinterested world. We might feel that today the storms are very often about those in the boat of the Church rather than about the circumstances outside it. And most of us are affected in some way or other by the improbability of the laws of nature being controlled by the voice of one man for the sake of his friends. So, why was it important that Jesus showed his authority at this time in this way. We almost get the feeling from what he says to these fishermen – "have you no faith?" that he would rather that his slumber on the cushion was not disturbed. Yet the record shows he did 'rebuke' the wind and command the sea to calm. And they did recognise Jesus as the one who was in control of what seemed chaotic forces. We have to remember that the big story in Mark, and in the other Gospels, is the victory over other chaotic and destructive forces. These come to their climax at the crucifixion and go to the centre of the storm in the heart of human beings. They are the forces of hatred, fear, lack of trust in God's goodness, in short, sin. We might say that all of the miracles, the healings, the feedings, the raising of the dead and the freeing of people from demonic control or mental turmoil – all of them – are signposts to what will happen at the end of Christ's life. None of them really make sense in the greater sweep of history other than as storms in a teacup, unless they point to a supreme act of control over chaos. The essential thing to take on board is how Jesus uses his authority. He may use divine power of his spoken word over the wind and sea or his touch over a disease but when it comes to his last and greatest work of power he lays aside 'control' that comes from subjecting these forces to his will. Instead, at the crucifixion, he deliberately shuns the role of the active agent but allows events to control him. At least this is how it seems on the outside. But Mark's readers know something deeper is going on. With Jesus' saving death he is speaking "Peace be still" to the deepest part of our souls. It is this that we can rely on when the last storm is past and he brings us safely to the shore.

With love and prayer for you all. Richard.