

The storm stiller

Mark 4: 35-41

Setting the scene

The Jews were most afraid of the sea. They believed that if you sailed too far you would fall off the edge of the world into the 'waters beneath the waters'. This fate was total oblivion.

The Jews believed that God was more powerful than anything in God's creation. High praise was given to God for ruling the seas, particularly stormy seas. The Psalmist required praise for God, who 'commanded, and raised the stormy wind, [and] lifted up the waves of the sea', scaring the sailors out of their wits. But then, God 'made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed'. (Psalm 107:25,29 NRSV)

The Mediterranean was the western boundary of the Jews' world. But even the Sea of Galilee, in the midst of their country, struck fear into their hearts. This large lake is notorious for sudden treacherous storms, and the tough Galilean fishermen of Jesus' time were held in awe for braving Lake Galilee.

Bible reading: Mark 4:35-41

Centring exercise

Choose one of the centring exercises from the earlier section.

Meditation

Picture in your mind a lake. * It is a very calm lake, stretching to the horizon in nearly every direction. You cannot make out the shore on the other side, although here and there you can see high hills in the far distance. * It is pleasantly warm here on the edge of the lake, even though it is nearly evening. You are sitting on the dry sandy shore looking over the lake. * You are feeling quite relaxed. It has been a busy day for you. You are one of the small group following the teacher Jesus around the province of Galilee. You remember some of the day's events. *

Most of the day has been spent with the other disciples. It has been a working day. You hear your friends coming down onto the beach. They are preparing a boat for sailing. * They call you over, and you help sort out sails and ropes. *

You set off in the boat into the lake. The lake is very calm, and from your position down in the boat the water seems even flatter than before. * Your companions are quiet, relaxed, calm, doing

only what is needed for the boat in the slow steady breeze. Jesus is already asleep on the stern seat of the boat. *

It grows darker. * You think for a while that the darkness is just night drawing on, but then you see dark clouds coming out of the horizon. * Ahead of the boat you see the black water flecked with white as the wind picks up water and turns it into turbulent waves. *

Suddenly the boat is in the storm. Imagine the storm – thunder, lightning, wind – the tossing, the turning, water spilling over into the boat, the desperate reaching and grabbing, trying to reduce sail, to secure belongings, to hold on tight and not be thrown out. * Feel your fear. Feel the tension in your body, in your hands and arms, in your back. Feel the fear in the pit of your stomach. You fear for your life. *

Jesus is still asleep at the stern, untroubled by the storm. The other disciples begin to shout, their voices puny against the wind. 'Jesus, wake up! Jesus, we're going down! Don't you care? Jesus, live up to your name and save us! Help us!' Feel their despair and frustration. * See Jesus stand in the stern, rocking, holding himself against the sides until he has his balance. * When he is standing, see him raise both hands, and hear the boom of his shout above the boom of the wind, the tearing and flapping of sail, the cracking of ropes and stays: hear his voice commanding, 'Stop! Be still'. *

Imagine the confusion in your mind and in the sky. Sea and sky teeter for a moment caught between a last orgy of their destructive power and an immense still invisible barrier of energy holding back the force of the storm; holding, holding, and finally conquering its power. * Then the stillness, still as when a boat is becalmed. * No wind, no movement on the water, the boat still and high in the water. The clouds gone, the moon reflects in the still water, making a shiny yellow swathe across the black. *

Feel your body relax again, find its calm again. * Feel the tension go out of your jaw, your shoulders, your stomach, your hands. * Let all the tension go. Let the calm enter into your body. Experience the complete peace after the storm. * Remember that Jesus is near you. * Reflect on that earth-stopping power which brought the storm to an end. * Feel his strong calm, his peace flow into you. * In your imagination, go over to Jesus, kneel or stand before him, and tell him how you feel about his power and his way of protecting you. *

Author: Ted Witham

24 From "Encounters with Jesus" edited
by Craig Mitchell, Melbourne: Joint Board of
Christian Education, 1992.