

## **STORMS**

I have no idea why but thunderstorms fascinate me. Others cringe at the thought of a storm. I enjoy them. Hearing the explosive sound of thunder just after the lightning strikes across a dark, cloudy sky is, to me, awesome! The basic ingredients of moisture, very unstable air and uplifting warm currents of air form a cocktail to create the storm. Small bits of frozen raindrops bump into each other and these collisions create an electric charge. Positive and negative charges, in different parts of the cumulonimbus clouds attract, causing a positive charge to build up on the ground beneath the cloud. The ground's electrical charge concentrates around anything that sticks up, such as hills, a tree or people! The charge from these connects with one reaching down from the clouds and - zap - lightning strikes! When lightning travels from cloud to ground a channel in the air is opened. When the light goes, the air collapses in on the channel and – bang - we have thunder. Lightning first, thunder second. Light travels faster than sound!

About 1,800 thunderstorms occur across our planet daily. An estimated 16 million thunderstorms occur worldwide per year. Thunderstorms cause around 100 deaths and over 100 injuries every year around the world, not surprising, as lightning is 5 times hotter than the sun's surface. They are all stormy - hailstorms, tornadoes, cyclones, hurricanes and tropical storms.

Storms are mentioned in the Bible. Elijah stands, forlorn, on the cliff edge outside the cave as the storm rages. “ a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord...After the earthquake came a fire...” In Acts we read of Paul's near-death shipwreck experience on the Adriatic Sea near Malta, with waves nearly 120 feet deep. And in today's gospel we have the storm on Lake Galilee. Mark and Luke have the same account. Matthew's is similar.

Storms do remind us that there are forces so much stronger than us. A storm is a reminder that we need a God who is stronger than any storm. The writer of Psalm 93 tells us (verse 3): “The seas have lifted up, O Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea—the Lord on high is mighty”. In our story, Jesus definitely reveals Himself as the God who is bigger than our storms. What can we find out about God and this storm? What about any storms of our life! I think it is time we dotted some 'i's!

### ***'i' for God's Intention (Mark 4:35)***

Jesus planned for He and His disciples to cross to the other side of the lake. When He said: 'let's cross over', he was really saying that he needed to go to where people haven't heard the word of God. 'This side they know me, they have heard of me, over the other side they haven't heard me.' This is an amazing picture for us. God implies we should break out of our self-created barriers, our limited expectations and comfort zones, to cross over and meet people who have never had anything to do with Jesus and, in our own way, bring them to Him. Our boat journey, our assignment, God's intention!

It's great to meet in church. We worship and glorify God. We enjoy his presence as well as the fellowship of each other. But there are people around us every day that have never heard about the kingdom of God, they know little or nothing of the God who loves them and the friendship of His Son Jesus. And they are struggling with storms in their lives, not knowing what to do. We have something that can help. It doesn't matter at what stage WE are at on our Christian journey, WE have something to help anyone who doesn't really know Christ. But we have to sail our boat out and cross the lake as it were. Jesus was leaving where He was and going to where they were. It's always like that.

We often fail in our good intentions, determined to help but not helping at all, setting out to do a good deed, only to end up not doing it? God never fails in His intentions! God's plan cannot be amended or stopped! Paul writes in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it..."

Our 'storms of life' are similar to nature's thunderstorms - very intense, uncertain, unexpected with unstable atmospheric conditions. Often there are a lot of charged emotions. Our storm may be when someone we dearly love dies unexpectedly, or when our job is not going the way we need it or intend it to go. Or we lose it! A personal illness or an illness of someone close, an accident, our own feeling of depression or that of someone close to us, a financial storm, a breakup of a relationship, separation or divorce! It could be a feeling of betrayal by someone we trust and love, when no one understands our heartache. It may be many things. Our storm confuses us, makes us anxious or stressed, hurts us, frightens us. It's when we hear those familiar whispers: "It's no use, it will never work. You may as well give up." At that point we should realise that God has a plan, and His plan is greater than our feelings! Vivian Greene's caption caught my eye on a plaque in the Fair Trade Shop in Canterbury, last week: 'Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain'. His intention is bigger than any storm I will ever experience! I have to learn to dance in the rain. Is that your belief too?

#### ***'i' for God's interpretation (Mark 4:37)***

Jesus is asleep in the storm. How could Jesus sleep through a raging storm in an open boat in the middle of the lake? The disciples were fearful of their lives and Jesus was sleeping a few feet away. The disciples believed this storm to be horrendous. There was absolutely nothing they could do. And that's the hard bit to deal with sometimes, when we wish we could change our circumstances and we can't. Jesus didn't see the storm as the disciples did. God doesn't see the storm the way we see the storm. His interpretation is bigger than our storm. In Isaiah we read: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55: 8-9). God uses the dark, scary, uncertain times of life as an opportunity for Him to demonstrate his power not ours, and for God to get the glory, not us. Does God use our storms to get us a little closer to Him? It is often very difficult to think this in the charged unstable conditions in the eye of our storm. Our own interpretation is often: Where is God? Does he care? Why isn't he doing anything? Seeking out the very depths of our faith is taking God at His Word despite the circumstances. Those disciples were scared out of their wits and Jesus was sleeping. We may be so scared that we're seriously biting our nails to the quick. But it's good to know that God's not biting His nails as his

interpretation is bigger than our storm!

***'i' for God's Inclination (Mark 4:38)***

The boat filled with water. The disciples believed that control was being lost to the storm. They believed they were finished so they woke Jesus. He listened and responded. God's inclination is to listen! Somehow he seems to hear even our faintest whisper. And God's inclination is to help. Although he was asleep, Jesus was aware of the storm and he did care for everyone's safety and help them face the storm. However dark, dingy and scary our storm may seem, do we have the faith that God's inclination is bigger than our storm!

***'i' for God's Intervention (Mark 4:39 and 41)***

We know that the disciples had seen Jesus' miracles before, but they still said: "What manner of man is this?" It was unreal. In our Gospel story God controlled the wind and the waves, so can he control our storm? The intense storm rain and gale force storm winds – calmed. A wonderful verse in Paul's Letter to the Romans says: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) My mind is very confused but somehow (and I do not know how!) God uses everything I have in my life to bring him glory. And if I learn to dance in the rain, he can use my storms too. He does the same for you. God intervenes and it's bigger than our storm!

***'i' for God's Instruction (Mark 4:40)***

There is no doubt that the disciples learned things through the storm that they may not have learned any other way. Jesus asked, "Where is your faith?" Where was it? Was it in the fact they thought they had a boat good enough to withstand the storm? Or was it in their physical strength and strength of character to somehow get them to the other side of the lake? It didn't seem to be in Jesus. They learned about their faith from the storm, as we do too! When God sends a storm our way, we see things (and people) differently. We need to let Jesus in! God's instructions are definitely bigger than our storms and reach well beyond them. The disciples learned about their future, too. On the other side, God wasn't through with them yet. There was something for them beyond the storm. There is life beyond any storm of ours and no way is God finished with any of us yet.

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