

Newington Methodist Church

Church Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, ME9 7JT

News and views for the week commencing 20th June 2021

We are OPEN!

All are welcome to join in our

Sunday services.

Check the new time 10:30 am



Notices

- **Sunday service on 20th June in the church** will be led by Margaret Bowerman, Local preacher from Hartlip. All precautions remain in place as we continue to prevent the infection of Covid 19. This Sunday is Father's Day and also we remember Refugee week campaign. **The Next Sunday** preacher will be Margaret Price from Sittingbourne.
- **Sunday 20th June circuit service 10:30** will be led by Elizabeth Harfleet, deaconess from Gravesend area. Follow the link: <https://youtu.be/hzCHDU2AEC0>

Dates for your Diary:

- Coffee morning, first Saturday in July will be on ZOOM
- Table top sale 17th July at church car park
- Refugee week, there is interesting podcast at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/podcasts/the-methodist-podcast-episode-59-refugee-week/>

Other activities you can join in during the week via Zoom

- **Bible study** – Tuesdays 2-3pm. We are studying the book of Acts.
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83665077649?pwd=SzQyQjZnTGRxeFNEOUUxMENla1d3Zz09#success>
- **Prayer and Share** 9:30 am. Meets fortnightly: 11.6.; 25.6.; 9.7.; 23.7.
<https://zoom.us/j/84866590559?pwd=UzILQkINK1BZa3Nya1p6M3lVnN4Zz09>

Meeting ID: 848 6659 0559 Passcode: 604787

A reflection on Mark 4:35–41 by Gillian Collins

Do you believe in miracles? I imagine all of us have been asked this at some time, often as the prelude to some predictable joke about how it would be handy to be able to change water into wine, or walk across a lake to save a long journey round the shore. Or maybe it was a more serious querying of our understanding of Christ's resurrection or his birth to a virgin mother. Such

questions from an "outsider" can leave us wrong-footed since we're unlikely to have an oven-ready answer. And that's the nature of a miracle – it's goes beyond normal explanation or accountability. My answer I'm afraid would not get far beyond "Well, it all depends on what you mean by 'believe' and 'miracle'..."

Others would say that when we're speaking of God and his Son Jesus Christ, all things are possible as signs of his glory and power, transcending the ordinary in ways we cannot and have no further need to account for. I am glad that I am able to hold either viewpoint or indeed any on a spectrum between traditional biblical literalism and a modern liberal perspective and still be a Methodist. (For a helpful insight into the variety of approaches to biblical authority, have a look on the Methodist Church website for "A Lamp to my Feet...", still being used to address some of the thorny issues of scriptural interpretation dividing Methodists today).

I've taken part in Bible studies where people have tried to take stories about Jesus apart and fill in the gaps – almost as though a miracle cannot be allowed to stand unless it's supported in some way with practical evidence. The disciples and Jesus were out on the lake in a violent storm and about to be overwhelmed? Perhaps it wasn't really as bad as they thought? But this story doesn't work unless the storm WAS as bad as they thought! Believe in a miracle or not, but don't try to explain it away!

I accept it as one of the "wondrous stories" told about Jesus's life and ministry. I'm not interested in when or where or how it did or didn't literally happen. But I do care about why the gospel writer we know as Mark told the story, what it may have meant to those hearing it in his own times, and how it may continue to teach and inspire us today.

Mark tells us that as evening fell, Jesus asks (some of) the disciples to put out in their boat to cross the lake. Apparently exhausted by the demands of the day spent in ministering to needy crowds, he falls asleep at the back of the boat, no doubt trusting to the wisdom and skill of his crew to bring him safely across. If there was bad weather in the offing, they as experienced fisherman would sense it. They might have said, "We should stay close to shore, where we are safe." But Jesus had called them to set out on this potentially risky journey, which is where this story would acquire an extra layer of meaning for Mark's first hearers.

What was on the other side? Decapolis (the Ten Towns), Gentile territory associated in their minds with "unclean spirits" and "swine" – a scary and unpredictable destination even without a storm during the crossing. In the context of the time – the infancy of the Church – this trip across the lake would parallel the first missionary outreach to the Gentiles. The storm at sea is like the turbulence in the early Church, seeking to follow Jesus' command "to go to the other side" and "make disciples of all nations."

The sea and ships provide a rich source of Bible imagery. Jesus and his followers obviously understood that the sea is sometimes friend and at other times a chaotic and perilous enemy. From their own history they knew the relevance of Noah's Flood, Moses and the parting of the waves, and why Jonah fleeing from God was cast into the ocean and swallowed whole by a great fish. They knew by heart the words of the Psalmist, and identified with his cries of distress in the setbacks of life when he felt overwhelmed.

Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink;

deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters.

Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. (Psalm 69)

The Church has always made copious use of seafaring imagery. The main area in a church building is often called the "nave," from the Latin "navis" = ship. The life of faith is often represented as a journey through uncharted waters, with possibly hostile enemies. We are all in the same boat - so who is our Pilot? Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?

These days most of us don't have to go anywhere to "get to the other side." The "Gentiles" live alongside us, we work with them and meet them as we go about our daily lives. They include the agnostics, the don't knows and the don't cares; we read and hear how the world looks from their viewpoint in our media. It can be hard to reach out, to go into every place, to reach people whose views and priorities are unlike our own, and often don't seem really interested in what we as Christians have to offer.

But sometimes it's just a boat.

There are no end of ways to allegorise the boat and everything else in this sea passage story. "Jesus is in the boat with you." "How many times does it feel like you are in a storm and Jesus is asleep?" "What boats are you in at this point in your life?" "What are the storms that are tossing your life around?" None of this is necessarily bad. It's just a boat in a story though, and may just be that – simply a means to get from one place to another. Maybe the point is that Jesus is just trying to get us into the boat when some of us would rather stay where we are. Jesus seems unwilling to let his disciples live on one side of the lake for too long, so he takes them to the other side. And getting to the other side is no easy trip, nor should we expect it. And for the early Church it resonated with their own call and challenge to take the message to uncharted places.

The disciples could have said to Jesus, "Well, what if there's a storm?" But there were always storms on the Sea of Galilee when you least expect them. If the disciples had said to Jesus, "Well, first tell us what's on the other side?" they would never have got into the boat, because see what ended up happening in the country of the Gerasenes? "Wait, what? We are going to encounter a demon-possessed madman who lives in the cemetery. And you are going to send his demons into a

herd of two thousand pigs. And then the pigs are going to go jump off the cliff? We'd rather stay here thanks."

The hardest thing is getting into the boat. You know this well, I imagine. If not now, then at some time in your life, or for someone close to you now. Some people we know are preparing to be ordained. A level students are thinking about apprenticeships or universities. People are moving jobs, houses, relationships. All of us are waiting to see what happens when finally Covid restrictions are lifted. What's on the other side?

All of us are faced by the huge and looming prospect of climate change. Forget the deniers, there is now virtually a consensus on this in the scientific world. We can't refuse to get into **that** boat, because that would be writing off our neighbours in those countries already suffering the terrifying effects. Our church here is hoping to engage with this by embarking (seafaring imagery again!) on the Eco-Church programme.

The promise of today's Gospel story is that God is with us on our journey, however rough the waves and wild the winds." Jesus was there all along, no matter that he was sleeping on a pillow.

The act of faith is not just in trusting that Jesus will still the storm and make everything comfortable again. It is in daring to take his invitation to heart, get into the boat, and go where he wants to go. **Amen**

People and places for prayer

- We remember refugees and the situation in UK, Kent where refugee land and where refugee camps are located.
- Pray for the Methodist conference 24th June - 1 July
- We pray for our indoor services to be Spirit filled. We pray for the stewards as they take extra care for our safety and prepare the service to be a worship experience. We pray for Newington community and may God open doors to the hearts of people. Thank you Bernard for putting up the large poster provided by the Six, telling all God loves them.
- Pray for each other's health, blessing and the presence of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Brian Davies is back from hospital, recovering. It was their 60 wedding anniversary as I found out just today.
- Val T. was taken to hospital last Friday and after several attempts to find out the latest news are that Val survived heart attack this week and later on was diagnosed with kidney failure.
- We remember our friends who have died and their loved ones: Audrey, Margaret S.

Please send news, prayer requests and any other contributions for inclusion in the weekly newsletter to robert.zachar@gmail.com

Bank details for Offerings: Newington Methodist Church, HSBC Sittingbourne. Sort Code 40 – 42 – 04, Account 70614696. If you prefer to send a cheque contact our church treasurer Chris Ch.