

Dear Friends,

Mark 4: 35-37

"Let us go across to the other side". Jesus is talking to his friends. They are sitting in a boat on Lake Galilee. On the shore there's a crowd of people. Jesus has been talking with them. He's been telling them stories about God. They are still there. They want more. His friends also want an encore. Their hearts have been burning within them while he's been talking. When they listen to Jesus, they feel as though they are listening to the words of God coming directly to them from heaven. Perhaps they say to him, "Please, can't we stay. It's good here. We feel happy and content, safe and comfortable. Why would we want to go anywhere else?" But Jesus insists. "It's time to leave. Let us go across to the other side". They start rowing. The boat moves away from the land. Listen and you can hear the sigh of disappointment from the crowd as they see the boat leaving.

Jesus has been engaging with the people. Now it's time to withdraw. He has been active. Now it's time to rest. One of his stories was about that. It was about a gardener who "sleeps and rises". He too needs to respect that natural rhythm which we all need to keep if we are to live well.

His friends take "him with them in the boat, just as he was". That simply means that he stays on the boat. Without getting out, he sails with his friends deeper into the lake. But I wonder if Mark also wanted to say more. Maybe he was talking about how important it is for you to just take Jesus as he is. It is not for you to force Jesus into a mould that you find comfortable and convenient. It is not for you to be selective about the bits of him that you like and don't like. Perhaps you don't want the Jesus who takes you into the storm, although you may want the Jesus who calms the storm. You may not want him when he is rejected, suffers and takes the way of the cross. You may want him even less when he turns to you and says, "take up your cross and follow me". By contrast, you may very much want him when he talks about preparing a place for you in the Father's house and about coming again to take you to himself. But you cannot pick and choose. You are called to take Jesus just as he is. Sometimes the journey with him will be through calm water. Sometimes it will be through a storm.

On this occasion the friends find themselves in a fierce storm. They are hit by a great gale. The waves batter and buffet the boat. The friends feel as though they are being lifted up to heaven and then brought down into the depths. The sea water swamps the boat. It is in danger of sinking. The friends are terrified. They think they may be about to die. They do everything they can, but it's not enough. And in all of this chaos and terror, Jesus is at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. He is fast asleep.

God bless you,

Tony