

Dear Friends,

Matthew 14 22-24

Jacob is having a week off. I will be leading the circuit's streamed service next Sunday. There we will spend time with Jacob's children and especially Joseph. "Keeping in Touch" for next week will be a slightly tidier version of what you will be able to hear on Sunday. This week, however, we are going sailing in a boat. This week we are going to spend with Jesus.

Jesus has been trying to get away from all the people. He would like to find a deserted place where he can be by himself. He's tried it once, but was followed by a crowd of well over five thousand people. He fed them with his word and with bread and fish. They all not only had enough, but they all ate and were filled.

Now, he makes his friends, the disciples, get into a boat. The word "made" is a strong one. It means he compelled, constrained, forced them. Once we sang of "Gentle Jesus meek and mild". Yes, he is gentle. He is also strong and knows when he needs to insist and when he does, he can't be resisted. In the boat they sail for the other side of the lake.

With his close friends gone he also sends the crowds away. Now he can try again to find that bit of space. He goes up a mountain by himself. And we find out what it is that he has been wanting to do. He needs to pray. Perhaps you too, today, may carve out time to be like Jesus and to do what Jesus does by giving time, even just a little time, to pray.

Jesus is alone high up on the mountain. His friends are alone in the boat deep down on the lake. Their boat is in trouble. They are far from land. The winds are against them. They are battered by the waves. Are they afraid? It does not say so, not yet, that comes later. Some of them are experienced at fishing. They are used to the conditions and know how quickly they can change. They know how best to handle them. Nevertheless, it is daunting. In Psalm 107 the poet describes what happens when a boat is at the mercy of the waves. It says, "They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths". This has a terrifying effect on those on board. It says "Their courage melted away in their calamity; they reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits end".

You too may have felt tossed about by the winds and waves of life. It may be how you feel now as you pass through the storm of the Coronavirus. In the Psalm those on the boat cry "to the Lord in their trouble". Maybe you too reach out to God hoping to find help.

For the friends of Jesus, he is far away. He is up the mountain. They are on the lake. They may be feeling abandoned. He sent them on this journey and now look what's happened. They may blame him. They may cry out, "Why has he forsaken us?" You too in your storms may wonder if God is with you.

Jesus may be up the mountain but he has not lost sight of them. He can see their trouble. He can see their need. He is praying for them. He has not lost sight of you. He can see your need. He is praying for you. You are never beyond his care.

He comes down the mountain and walks towards them in the boat.

God bless you,

Tony