

Ordinary Sunday 12B

23.06.24

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It's important to remember that Mark had written his Gospel for a community of faith that was being vilified and persecuted simply because they had given their allegiance to the risen Jesus. These early Christians risked being hunted down and butchered for their faith. The storm that threatened Jesus and the Twelve in today's Gospel is used by Mark as a symbol for the storm of persecution that threatened Mark himself and his fragile community of faith.

Mark simultaneously used the storm on the lake as a metaphor for the opposition that confronted Jesus in the course of his public ministry. From the outset, Jesus had stated that his mission was to usher in the kingdom of God. This inevitably led to a succession of confrontations with religious authorities, who regarded themselves as the sole custodians of religious truth and practice. Moreover, there were additional confrontations with evil expressed in the protestations of demons that had taken possession of the lives of their unfortunate victims. These evil spirits had pleaded with Jesus to refrain from interfering with them. The storm on the lake also heralded the opposition that would confront Jesus and his apostles when they had crossed to the other side and trespassed into what was clearly regarded as pagan territory.

In stating that the Apostles took Jesus into their boat "just as he was", Mark was indicating that Jesus was as vulnerable as anyone else. Being fully human, Jesus was as vulnerable to risk, threat, danger, disease, physical exhaustion, frustration and other debilitating emotion as every other human being. Vulnerability is the lot of every single one of us.

Mark proceeded to point out that once Jesus was roused from his sleep and took in the danger of the raging storm, he spoke directly to the swirling wind and buffeting waves: "Peace! Be still!" That was illustrative of his approach to everyone and everything that confronted him. He spoke to the storm in exactly the same way as he would speak to the demons that had taken hold of the lives of those beset evil and sickness. Mark was making the point that Jesus was open to engaging with anyone and everyone, be they antagonistic, religious leaders, public sinners, Samaritan women, tax collectors, ostracised lepers, demons or Roman centurions. This extraordinary man, who was the Christ of God, was ready and able to bring a word of peace to everyone he encountered, even to those who seemed unable or unwilling to accept it.

The message in this story of the calming of the storm was Mark's way of telling his community and us that because Jesus was the man he was, the Messiah of God, he is ready to take every one of us just as we are. There is no need for us to be fully prepared for him to come into our lives. We can go to him in all our vulnerability, concern, sinfulness, inadequacy and messiness. God loved us into life to live in hope and joy, contentment and peace. The risen Jesus promises us peace in the same way as he promised it to his disciples when he appeared to them after his resurrection and found them locked away in fear. We can be sure that he regards us as worthy and vulnerable enough to receive the peace he offers us and for us to be instruments of that peace to others.