

Sunday 19th September 2021

John 6:15-21 (Peace in the storm)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Good morning and welcome to our service my name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how God's peace in the storm.

A prayer - Father God we ask your Holy Spirit to be with us as we hear your word and celebrate your love for us. Amen.

Now Kemi will lead us in our intercessions then I will read our bible passage before speaking.

Prayers

From the rising of the sun to its setting, let us pray to our father, we pray for our whole family of church Holy Trinity and St John in Christ your son, we are one body, with many members and each member belongs to one another, help us to remember that every member does not have the same function but each have individual gifts and ministries according to the grace you have given us, guide us to use our spiritual gifts for the church generously and diligently, we lift Jessica our minister to your care, may you God of peace continue to equip her with everything for doing your ministry and may you work in her what is pleasing to you through the Holy Spirit and help each member to collaborate with her at serving you, our community and wider communities.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for the community we live, and ask you to guide us to be always aware of our neighbours need and ways we can help show us how we can show your love to others.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Creator God, we pray for the peace of our nations, may all countries that suffer violence, injustice, war, terrorism find peace and reconciliation, we pray for the people of the world and leaders of all nations may uphold what is right and good

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for our CAP centre, thank you for those volunteers for this year, thank you for the drop in, we pray for more volunteers to help and that people throughout Penge community will continue to be aware of CAP's work and feel inspired to support by volunteering and clients with health, relationship or other problems are given the strength to manage their situations with the help of other agencies. We ask that the holy Spirit to lead and strengthen Rachael, Lynn and Gareth as they help their clients out of debt.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, your generous love supplies us with all that we need, we know that all that we have is yours. We thank you for the work that you have done in our church through foodbank by the means of generous support of many people, we pray for your blessings on all those who give and receive, help the food to get to those who need it most.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for those in need in our families and community, thinking of the elderly, the housebound those undergoing treatment or waiting the result of tests we also pray for those who care for them and all who bring both material and spiritual comfort at times of need, we commit those in our church family who need our ongoing prayers at this time to your loving care remembering Maria, Yvette, Betty, Val Beck way, Geresse, Will, Antony, Barbara and Keith, Jess. Let us take a moment of silence to bring anyone we know in prayer.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Merciful father, we pray for those who have died due to coronavirus and other illness, and for all who are coming to the end of their journey, we think of those we have loved, but see no longer, who live on in our memories, loving God, be with all who mourn and surround them with your love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss, but have confidence in your goodness and strength to meet the days to come.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

We praise you for all you have done in the past, we look forward with thankfulness for all you will do in the future and thank you for today and always.

Merciful father accepts these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.

In unity we say together the prayer our saviour Jesus Christ taught us.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name your kingdom come,
Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and glory are yours.
Now and for ever. Amen.

Reading – John 6:15-21

15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, **17** where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. **18** A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. **19** When they had rowed about three or four miles, [b] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. **20** But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." **21** Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Talk

We pick up the narrative in John where Jesus has been teaching the people and then ends up conducting the miracle of feeding 5000 people.

The crowd want to take Jesus back with them and to make Jesus king. This is not what Jesus came for. So foreseeing their intent he withdraws and leaves the disciples and goes into the mountains. Jesus had often done this when he was tired or preparing to face the next challenge. He withdrew to be alone and in order to pray and be close to his Father.

The disciples are now left without Jesus and as evening draws in they decide to go about their business and take the boat across Lake Galilee. Jesus had left them so maybe they felt a bit fed up - you know Jesus is doing what he is good at so let's do what we are good at and so they set out. We can see they are just a few men in a boat, alone in the dark, rowing against the wind and, as often happens when you follow Jesus, opposition comes and sure enough a storm blows up. The mood was probably not good and they were a bit discouraged and now they get a little worried.

We could see this as a picture of the church.

A church being a small number of people remote from where most people live – seemingly irrelevant to the great issues facing the world. The people tossed by the winds of secular society from outside and dogged with uncertainty and controversy inside. Out of touch with where they started from and not sure where they actually are. A little uncertain of the final destination. It seems a bit bleak but it is how many people view the church and sadly it is often how it appears to those within the church.

But we try our best to strain, like the disciples on the oars, to do good works and ministry yet we seem to make no progress. Like the disciples we can't quite see Jesus in the midst of the storm and it seems very dark and a bit lonely.

That can seem a bit of a grim outlook but let's remember earlier when I spoke about Peter walking on the water towards Jesus. When he was focussed on Jesus and what Jesus had told him to do he was OK. However once he started to think about if his feet were on or below the water and he listened to the wind and the waves and allowed the worldly noise to drown out the voice of Jesus then his attention was taken from what Jesus wanted him to do and instead he was concerned with what the world was doing. That's when it went wrong for Peter. When we worry more about what the world thinks of us than what Jesus thinks of us then we sink under those cares. Our

doubts and lack of faith get in the way of our relationship with Jesus. But all is not lost. Let's return to the disciples in the boat.

Now at their moment of need they see a figure out to sea. These are experienced fishermen who know the lake and understand the storm however to see someone walking on the water is not normal so cue time to be frightened. This is not unusual as often when deliverance approaches in an unusual way we can misread it and become fearful just as the disciples did when they thought Jesus was a ghost.

When Jesus comes into a person's life it doesn't mean life will be plain sailing for it can mean difficult situations for example Peter's shame when facing the resurrected Jesus whom he had denied or real hardship such as Paul following Jesus call and ending up in prison and facing death!

In this case the disciples heard Jesus call to them however in the earlier story about Peter when he sank he was very specific in his prayer "Lord save me" he cried and Jesus did. Jesus took him by the hand and raised him out of the water into the boat. We can trust Jesus to help us maybe not always in the way we think or expect but he is faithful.

So Jesus comes to the disciples for although they had lost sight of Jesus - Jesus had never lost sight of them and their situation. For he would never abandon them and he will never abandon us his church. Jesus calls to them in the midst of their fear. He says, "It is I, do not be afraid" or more literally "I AM", "stop being afraid"

This is the same name God uses for himself in Exodus 3v14 talking to Moses from the burning bush.

Further we read about God in Ps 107v29-31

28 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
29 He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
30 They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
31 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.

Now here we find that when Jesus gets into the boat not only is the storm quietened but that they reach their destination. Jesus is demonstrating the same power over creation that the psalmist wrote about God in Ps 107. Jesus is showing in a very practical way that he is the son of God and has the same authority over the wind and waves.

It is easy for us to think of what Jesus had done and wonder why the disciples didn't see who Jesus really was. But we have the advantage of knowing the end of the story and having the chance to read as many times as we like about the teaching and works of Jesus. We know the wonderful truth of his death for us on the cross and his resurrection. And how his Holy Spirit is with us now. To be fair to the disciples they did eventually grasp the truth and from then on they served faithfully to the ends of their lives wherever that took them. That commitment is something I think we all find challenging.

I keep using the image of storms but what are the storms of our lives? Let's face it most of us don't go out at night in boats! So here are a few examples by no means definitive or exhaustive.

- A business failure or unemployment.
- The daily toil against poverty - maybe multiple jobs on low wages or zero hours contracts.
- Perhaps the constant battle to raise children as a single parent
- Maybe struggling with our faith because of the death of a loved one
- Or living with a debilitating illness or disability or addiction
- There may be domestic violence or a drunkard family member
- or perhaps it seems like one problem after another problem without any rest and it just grinds you down.

Well, Jesus sees this and weeps for a broken world. In this world there is no guarantee of an easy life without problems, stress or worry. Jesus never promised that but he did promise a future with him in heaven. God cared enough about us to send Jesus to die for us so that a relationship with him was possible. But he is gracious and will not muscle in but waits for you to respond. Sometimes he is in your face like Paul on the road to Damascus but usually it is that small quiet voice.

What we have to remember is that when we reach the end and call out for Jesus, like the disciples, we have to understand what we are doing. We can't ask Jesus to stay at the back of the boat in the water and hold on to give a push when we need him. We are asking the son of the living God, the son who has power over the created world. It is him we are inviting into the boat, into our lives. This means making room for him and allowing him to take control otherwise what is the point of asking his help? This will mean getting rid of things in our life or stopping things so there is room and it will definitely mean swallowing our pride. No longer self-centred but God centred. This is what Paul calls dying to self or sin and living for Christ

For Christ brings hope and power to us his church so that when we are downcast or afraid we can witness his work and then our fear is replaced with awe and wonder and our cries for help become cries of praise and worship.

But is it always like this? Well from personal experience I can say that I didn't experience that peace when my son was unwell a few years back or when we had two small children and my wife had a lump in her breast (thankfully it was nothing). In these cases I was troubled and struggled but we had the support of church family.

However I had complete peace of mind when my wife was facing open heart surgery, or when my daughter was a baby facing an operation or going on a pastoral visit about domestic abuse. Why are they different I'm not sure but I know for certain that Jesus wasn't any different for he is always the same. Reflecting on these examples I think it was to do with where my focus was.

Jesus still comes to us through the storms of life, for these times help to strengthen our faith, and because he wants to walk with us through whatever we face so as to assure us that he is faithful. The peace Jesus brings is peace with God not peace from problems. Then as we recover his presence in our lives and experience anew his love and power we as individuals and the whole church will be carried forward and even in the darkness and storms we will always make the shore. That is His kingdom in heaven.

The peace Jesus brings is described in Phil ch4v7 (Living Bible translation) it says,
“that you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus”.

The disciples asked who is this man that even the wind and waves obey him? And they knew truly that Jesus is the son of God and they worshipped him.

We all face the same question.

Is there room in your life for Jesus? Or if you know Jesus, is he the centre or has the hustle and bustle of life, and even church life, slowly and imperceptibly pushed him to the edge?

Jesus is still there waiting so why not welcome him into the boat and hand him the tiller.

Amen

A closing prayer from 1 Thessalonians ch5v23

May the God of peace himself make you entirely pure and devoted to God; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept strong and blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes back again. God, who called you to become his child, will do all this for you, just as he promised.

Amen.

Thank you for taking the time to read or listen and may God bless you this week in these coming days.