

Because of its low-lying position in the rift valley, surrounded by hills, the Sea of Galilee can get sudden violent storms. Its weather is always changing.

Eularia Clarke believed her special calling from God was to make the Gospel scenes come to life. Potential observations from her depiction might be:

1. it is a serious, life-threatening storm;
2. there is fear on the faces of all;
3. although some you only see by their hands;
4. it is overwhelming;
5. no one other than Jesus appears to have any control;
6. people are trying to hold on to something to give them an anchor point (e.g. the mast, the sides of the boat, the rudder, each other);
7. the children are being protected;
8. Jesus is lying down and is calmly in control of the situation from a position of resting (not standing!);
9. the gesture of his hand echoes the image of a dove (i.e. the Holy Spirit).

Ask people, as they listen to the reading, to imagine the feelings that the disciples in the boat might have had. They could perhaps recall a storm that blew unexpectedly into their life, or that of someone they know, or that of the whole world – such as in the height of last year’s pandemic. Recall the feelings of fear, the thoughts, the questions they had. Was one of the questions ‘Don’t you care, God’?

Now is the day of salvation.’ The time to engage with life and faith is now. Faith is not theoretical. If we are not to accept the grace of God ‘in vain’, we need to respond with faith to what we find at this particular moment in our lives. We need to greet the grace of God with an open heart and innovate on our plans with courage. Then we will develop the character to cope with sleepless nights, hard work, afflictions and baseless accusations. We won’t escape from suffering and storms, but we will learn to recognise the presence of God in each moment.

Jesus leaves the crowds after a full day of teaching to get some rest. Jesus sleeps in the boat while the boat becomes engulfed in a storm. Because of the location of the Sea of Galilee, storms occurs quickly and violently. The disciples are astonished that he is not alert to the circumstances and their fear. When they eventually wake him, he calms the storm and questions their lack of trust in God.

Perhaps the biggest faith question there is the one that the disciples ask of Jesus when he is asleep: ‘do you not care that we are perishing?’ Our big questions may be different, but it is important to feel heard as we wrestle with challenges of life in general and in following Jesus.

It is interesting that on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus was asleep, the disciples didn’t wake him and yell, ‘Save us!’ but ‘do you not care that we are perishing’?

Maybe we know that given the way the world is, difficult things will happen to us and to those we love, and we can’t avoid them. We know there is disease, accident,

natural disaster, redundancy, failure and more. Our first instinct might be to say: 'Take it away, God!' But we will probably accept that this is not always possible, because that doesn't seem to be how the world works. So, our next urgent question to God might be: 'Don't you care that this is unbelievably hard?'

The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills, except for a valley dip at one end, which can act like a funnel for the wind. This means that the water can go from glassy calm to choppy white horses very quickly, as the wind whips up the water. As seasoned fishermen on this large freshwater lake, this will not have been the first time that the disciples have experienced this phenomenon, but this time it was particularly severe. Their complaint to Jesus is about the apparent mismatch between their peril and his continuing nap: they do not cry, 'Help!' or 'Do something!', they question whether he cares. This is not a theoretical argument about whether he could (or should) intervene miraculously; it is not like the moment when the synagogue leaders stand at the sidelines to see whether he will heal someone on the sabbath. This is not a theoretical question about power at all. It is a cry from the heart, an exasperated rebuke from friends who feel abandoned: 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' Perhaps all they expect is another pair of hands to join in bailing out water from the boat. Instead, Jesus changes the vast space of the inland sea simply by speaking. Jesus' questions to them – 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' – underline that they still only have a sketchy picture of who he is. The miracle affects the disciples more than the storm did.

During the ongoing pandemic most people have learned to live in hope. But even hope can be sorely tested when the hard times seem to go on and on. This is especially so in the light of the government announcement last Monday of what many people have called 'the postponement of freedom'. Again the country is forced to wait for the moment everyone has been waiting for!

One of the most enjoyable times I can remember spending with my father was on a trip he and I made to Scotland when he was 92. I'd agreed to take him to visit some of the places he knew whilst serving in in RAF Coastal Command during WWII. He served in Sunderland Flying Boat aircraft on convoy duty and U-boat search and destroy over the North Sea and later the North Atlantic from Belfast. Each flight could be 15 hours or so. Long, cold hours flying over the seas far out of sight of any land. He told me so many stories of those few years of his life. Times of danger, fear, tears and laughter all rolled into one. As for so many millions of people they were life changing times that stay with him to this day.. He was 18 years old. He is 96 years old now.

One of dad's stories that stick in my mind most took place not in the raging seas and skies of the North of Britain, but in his home town of Birmingham. Whenever he told this story he always began it the same way.... "I was on leave in my parents house when this happened." He would then preface the story with the following "Love

protects us from nothing, even as it unexplainably sustains us in all things.” My mother and father lived in Birmingham and mum nursed my father in the same back to back house they had come to on their marriage. One night, bombs were falling and she was on her own in the house. My father was in hospital receiving treatment as a result of the gas attacks he experienced in World War One. Most of her children already in the armed services of one kind or another, I had taken my youngest brother to the cinema. As we returned the bombs began to fall. We ran towards home in between each pause in the raid, stopping to take cover as each stick of bombs fell. When we got home we found our mother out of her mind with anxiety as fears for us roared in her head. She told us that as the bombs fell she heard a still small voice tell her to get up and do the washing – a safe, neutral practical task. It calmed her down, restoring her to a sense of trustfully getting on to do her bit. Despite the blasts and fires of that dark evening, next morning the sun rose and indeed all the family were fine. My mother sang as she did most days, New every morning is the love’ ....”