

A tale of two boats

Mark 4:35-40

Jesus Calms the Storm

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

New International Version (NIV)

Last week we went away for a few days to Cologne as a Pearl Anniversary treat. We decided to get there by going across to Holland on the ferry. Our return day was April 12th. It reminded me of the same date 100 years ago when a ship, much the same size left Southampton on its maiden voyage never to return – the Titanic. The ship we were on, the Stena Hollandica is larger than the Titanic but much of its safety procedures date from the Titanic tragedy. What a pity the lessons were not learned in such a hard way! We all know that the Titanic struck an iceberg and sank with the loss of 1572 lives.

Titanic was designed as the most advanced, the fastest and the safest ship of its time. The owners just never conceived that the ship could possibly sink. This is what Captain Edward Smith said before he sailed the Titanic out on that voyage: *"I cannot imagine any condition which would cause a ship to founder. I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that."*

So bad was their complacency that when a nervous passenger asked a steward if such a large lump of steel floating on water was safe got the reply *"even God Himself cannot sink this ship."* That's where the story of that phrase come from.

So did God sink the Titanic? Of course not. The owners, White Star Line didn't need any help – they did a pretty good job of doing it themselves and causing the massive human tragedy. Because of their complacency, they never had enough lifeboats. More were designed for the ship but the Government didn't deem them necessary and besides they would detract from the smooth line of the ship! Captain Smith then sailed the ship recklessly fast into a known area of icebergs. Having struck one, the ship then continued on at steam, even though it caused water to flow in through the ruptured hull plates faster than they could pump it out.

Why such a muddle. Because they assumed their ship could never sink. Ships are large steel boxes. Make a hole in them and they will fill with water and plunge to the bottom of the sea. Larger ships than the Titanic have gone down with similar ease over the years, and usually human error was involved, ranging from bad maintenance, poor navigation, poor seamanship and just plain negligence as well as war.

It reminded me of a scripture. We know it well, because I preached don it here a couple of years ago: Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*

The way of man in the case of Titanic seemed right – a reliance on modern technology even though it didn't have all the answers, the reliance on the experience of the captain and crew to continue at full-speed despite the risks, the failure to install proper lifeboats. Everything that could go wrong did. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

In our Bible reading this afternoon we see thirteen men in a boat being sailed by some very experienced sailors on a stretch of water that they knew well. The boat hits a storm, but no worries. They've seen plenty of these before. But this was no ordinary storm. It was fierce. They feared for their lives. All hands were needed to keep the boat afloat if they were to survive. But where was Jesus? Fast asleep!

We know the rest of the story. The disciples woke him and said to him, *"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"* I don't think they were asking for a miracle. They probably wanted Him to bail! Jesus was in the boat, but they were the sailors and the way seemed right to them. But they were sinking fast and afraid.

How do we cope with the storms of life. We're older people. There's no-one under half a century old. We're

old hands at life aren't we. Are we relying on ourselves because we've seen it all and done it all? Captain Smith did and look where it got him and his ship. However long we might even have been a Christian, we so often try to deal with the storms of life by ourselves. Praying is not the first course of action, or if it is, we pray and then get on with bailing our ourselves.

And what happens? We flounder and then pray and say to Jesus, *"don't you care if we drown?"* Of course He does. Our problem is that so often we want the answer to be our answer. That day, the disciples got their answer. Jesus didn't pick up a bucket to bail, he just looked at the storm and simply said *"Quiet! Be still!"* In modern language he said "shut up". And it did. There were no great words and gesticulations, just the short sharp word of the Master. And it fell calm.

It wasn't the answer they were looking for, but it was the right one. As we come to Communion this afternoon, who or what are we relying on to deal with our problems and issues? What answers are we expecting.

This bread and wine reminds us that right at the core of our existence as God's people is a saviour who has died for us, His body broken, His blood shed. Because of that demonstration of the mercy, grace and love of God, we are His people. So when we say "Lord, don't you care?" Then that's your answer. The other answer is a God who deals with our problems and situations, but never look for just the conventional answer, but look and expect a Jesus who comes up with surprises, it may be a huge miracle, but more often than not it's just the "Quiet, be still" that's required. So I leave us with the words of Jesus as this scene concludes: *"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"* Let's trust, let's expect from the One who has died for us – but always look out for His way instead of handing Him the bucket and saying, "start bailing!!"

*Preached by Mark Reid
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