

*Sermon by the Revd Canon Tim Schofield, Precentor  
Sung Eucharist 24/2/2019*

## **Second Sunday before Lent, Year C 2019**

Who, then is this? (Luke 8 v. 25)

The psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, once suggested that if everyone lived within sight or sound of the sea many of the mental health issues that afflict us would be eradicated. It has to be said that those who lived in biblical times would not have shared his therapeutic view of the sea or its efficacy for mental health. The Israelites were a people of the land, not of the sea – for them the sea was a dangerous place of primeval chaos; a frightening, unpredictable force that could suddenly erupt in storm and tempest. Only one person could control the ocean’s raw power and, according to today’s Psalm, that person was God. “You”, says the Psalmist to God, “still the raging of the seas, the roaring of the waters and the clamour of the peoples.”

And this is the mind-set of the disciples when they find themselves in that boat on the Sea of Galilee (although Luke actually calls it a lake, reserving the term sea for the Mediterranean). Whether lake or sea the waters could still be terrifying and so when the storm of destruction engulfed them they shook Jesus awake, afraid for their lives. And Luke tells us that Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves. Rebuke is the word used a few verses later when Jesus exorcises demons from a man possessed and indeed there were some in the ancient world who believed the sea to be the abode of evil spirits. Certainly in response to the rebuke of Jesus the wind and the waves ceased and there was a calm which left the disciples amazed – “who then is this”, they say?

The question of the identity of Jesus is a constant theme in Luke's Gospel. In earlier chapters the question had been asked by the disciples of John the Baptist, by the Pharisees and indirectly by the residents of Nazareth. But, this is the first time his own disciples have asked of Jesus – who then is this? And one conclusion we are meant to draw is that Jesus is the Son of God – the divine presence with us who can “still the raging of the seas and the clamour of the peoples”.

But, I think this gospel passage is not only about the divinity of Jesus, as vital as that is. In today's first reading we heard how God gave to humanity the vocation to till and keep the Garden of Eden before things went all wrong. This calling to tend and care for God's creation was not something onerous. In a famous passage St. Augustine said that “the tilling and keeping of the garden was not toilsome but joyful on account of the experience of the powers of nature.” There was a harmony between humanity and the natural world that was a source of profound joy – the tending and keeping of the garden, of working with the powers of nature, was a delight to the human heart.

Yet, this joy, while it is not lost, has been dissipated by the sin of human beings. So although Alan Titchmarsh thinks we have become a nation of gardeners who can't get enough of shopping at garden centres the scriptures have a caveat about our relationship with the land. They observe that tilling and keeping have become hard work even for those who relish creating something beautiful from the face of the earth. And this diminishment of joy is something St. Paul hints at in his letter to the Romans when he says that creation is in some sense frustrated or out of kilter so long as humanity is unredeemed. Genesis symbolises this in the way that, after Adam and Eve get it all wrong, the earth brings forth thorns

and thistles which wound and frustrate our relationship with the earth.

And this is where we must return to today's gospel. When Jesus healed the Sea of Galilee, and I really think that was Luke's understanding of what was happening, he not only revealed his divinity but showed us what humanity is meant to be. Our vocation is to work *with* creation; to tend and care for it; exercising a relationship of peace and harmony with the natural world. But, that vision of harmony can only fully come about as God heals *us* and restores our relationship with himself and his creation. And that is why ultimately Christians will always need to discuss attitudes to the environment in the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

To explain what I mean we need to look a bit more at the identity of Jesus. When Jesus was nailed to the cross Luke records that an inscription was placed over him: "This is the King of the Jews". One of the criminals crucified alongside him perceived this mark of kingship in Jesus so clearly that before he died he said to our Lord: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom". And the reply of Jesus is deeply significant: "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise". The word "paradise" is actually a Persian word meaning "walled garden". When a Persian king wanted to honour one of his subjects he called them to walk with him in this most beautiful of gardens. So although in the Genesis parable Adam and Eve hid in fear when they heard the voice of God as he walked in the Garden, now in the paradise garden opened to us by Jesus we can walk with him without fear – that's the message. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus our relationship with God and with creation is restored – paradise lost becomes paradise regained in a very particular way.

The trouble is as true as all that is it can sound merely poetic and a little otherworldly. So how do we earth this insight about Jesus the

King? How do we use it as a reconciling force between us, God and his creation now? The 20<sup>th</sup> century French mystic and political activist, Simone Weil, talked of the way the God can descend into our hearts and admire the tangible beauty of his creation. To echo a famous hymn God can be in our eyes and in our looking as we gaze at the beauty of creation around us. And we can anticipate paradise beyond death by talking to God about what we see as we walk through the garden of this world – Lord, do you see the beauty of that tree which you have made? Do you see the wonder of the sky that you have created? God sees what he has made through our eyes which only adds to the worth of his gift as we perceive it as a sign of his love.

And by entering into conversation with God about his creation we increase our capacity to let it be and to remember that tilling and keeping does not mean dominating it. All this is only possible, though, as we celebrate who Jesus is – the divine presence with us; the human person as we are meant to be and the King who died and rose again for us that we might be reconciled with God and walk with him in Paradise.