

SERMON FOR PENTECOST 5

ST DAVID'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, BURNSIDE
23 JUNE 2024

Experience is a wonderful teacher. As a young school leaver I was taught to exercise self determination and never to ask a question until I had searched for an answer. Trained as a priest and adopting the same self determination I eventually came to appreciate that a parish is not an area of territory to be managed solely by the priest. It was for me a significant step to understand that a leadership role can easily be distorted by ignoring the advice of others. That's why I can vouch for St Paul's words from the beginning of 2 Corinthians chapter 6, *"As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain."* 2 Cor. 6.1

St Paul is consistently promoting the importance of unified Christian community life, and as we see in this morning's reading, he uses his sufferings to qualify and make quite clear that his intention is to educate the Corinthian church to be a more convincing loving community. He doesn't mince words as we see in this quote, *"There is no restriction in our affection, but only in yours. In return - I speak as to children - open wide your hearts also."* 2 Cor 6.???

Well I don't speak to you as children because I know you strive to do your best as I do, to be a community of excellence in every respect. That is why we are keen to be reminded not to accept the grace - favour, assistance, helpful guidance, of God. And not without an understanding of its value. We are urged not to accept the grace of God in vain.

Following on from last Sunday's sermon we remember that our Lord is with us all the way, whether during good or bad times. Of course during bad times we would wish things were different. But it's during these times that we are tested and will reveal the level of faith we have, just as the disciples did as they encountered with fear the stormy sea.

I'm not a good sailor. The only sea I can survive on is one that is flat, calm, and with perhaps only a ripple. This came home to me a long time ago as I endured 12 hours of lying flat on my back next to the diesel engine of the very small launch I was travelling on through undulating seas. Lying down was the only position I could prevent the outward delivery of the last meal I had had. And if I thought this was a once only event I was wrong. Travelling back to Port Moresby in a broken down government vessel towed by another through even more undulating seas, lying on my back was the only way to prevent the outward delivery of breakfast until (and this was also an important lesson for me) a loud cry brought me to my feet. Opening the cabin door I was greeted by the stern of the once towing vessel rubbing the side of the vessel I was on. Crew members were trying to push the vessel away. A futile action if ever there was one, no doubt born out of fear. But the sight fixed my seasickness immediately. Was it the sense that I was about to end up in the sea 12 kms off shore or was it simply a sense of amazement. Whatever it was, it certainly fixed feeling helplessly seasick.

So I have some understanding about the fear the disciples would have felt being tossed about and swamped by the sea - I have a great understanding of their predicament. And there is something to be said about the annoying evidence of Jesus supposedly asleep on a cushion at the time others were, if not seasick,

certainly fearful. You know how annoying it is to be green around the gills and either your wife or friend is bouncing around unaffected and saying 'what's wrong with you?'

But this isn't a story about fear of the chaos of the sea or the annoying fact that someone else is unaffected. This is a story about the abiding and calming influence the Lord Jesus has on this situation.

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus woke up and said to the sea, *"Peace be still!"* And then he said to the disciples in the boat, *"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"*

Yet there is more to this story. St Mark wants us to realise and take on board (pun intended) that whatever appears to overwhelm us or in fact is overwhelming us, Jesus, Son of God, Saviour of all, has the power to calm us and save us from fear, the sense that we are indeed helpless, the sense of being alone in our misery. And it could be if we drill down into the story we find that it is about the eternal salvation Jesus has power to provide for all who travel with him. "Peace be still!"

It may sound corny to repeat the words "Why are you afraid?" But the question Jesus asks will only be answered when we have faith to trust Jesus in situations that are beyond our influence and control, when we are in the loneliness of our fear and misery. Now you may think you are not in any of those situations for the question "Why are you afraid?" to be relevant. But some are now. And maybe we will be at some time.

The boat of life is always in danger of being swamped by the sea of death. As I said at the beginning, the value of God's grace granted in the words of Jesus, "Peace be still!" should not be granted in vain.

Fr John

Friday 21 June 2024