

PSALM 62 verses 1-13

¹ Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.

² Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken.

³ How long will you assault me? Would all of you throw me down – this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

⁴ Surely they intend to topple me from my lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.

⁵ Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.

⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.

⁷ My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

⁹ Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie. If weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath.

¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

¹¹ One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: 'Power belongs to you, God,

¹² and with you, Lord, is unfailing love'; and, 'You reward everyone according to what they have done.'

JOHN chapter 6 verses 16 - 21

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, 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.

“YOU ARE NEVER ALONE”

3. God is with you in the storm

READING: *John chapter 6 verses 16 - 21*

We are continuing our looking at the miracles of Jesus in John’s Gospel, reminding ourselves of the promise that God is with us in also situations of life and that, despite feeling alone at times, we are never alone. These accounts of the miracles performed by Jesus are not just nice “twee” stories to read to children perched on our knees, or cwtched in, or even as they are being tucked up for the night. In each of these events, there is a lesson for us all to learn.

Today we move to **John chapter 6**. The chapter starts off in very dramatic fashion where Jesus works a major miracle with the packed lunch of a small boy comprising of 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish, resulting in the feeding of 5000 men. For some reason, probably cultural, women and children were not included in the head count. But that doesn’t mean they were not fed also. After the event, Jesus perceives that the people are so taken by what had happened that they were about to proclaim him as king, thus causing a rebellion and possibly, much bloodshed. But Jesus that the time was not right, and that this was not in line with his mission, so we find that he takes himself off into the mountains to be alone. Matthew and Mark say that Jesus went up the mountain to pray, but what for? Maybe it was for the disciples whom he had just sent on a boat journey to Capernaum, knowing what was going to happen before the night was out. Some of the disciples were experienced fishermen who knew the lake well, but what was about to transpire tested even their expertise. Rather than revelling in the joy of the miracle which had just happened and sharing the wonder of it all with the miracle worker, the disciples set off in the darkness to face the storm of their lives. But why would Jesus let this happen to those he cared for?

How often have we asked ourselves a similar question? If you care for me Lord, why am I facing this? Why is this happening to me? Over this past year, the question will have been asked all too often by many people, for many reasons, and for some, the pain of asking is still very real and very raw. For us all, it seems that the immediate storm has not lulled yet. So, what encouragement, if any, can we take from this short account.

It really goes without saying, but say it I will, our world is a troubled place – pandemics, wars, natural disasters, injustice, the list seems endless. The Sea of Galilee, on a beautiful day, can be a place of tranquility but because of its geographical location storms can arise quickly and with great ferocity. Even the most experienced sailors will find themselves caught out, and we have at least 2 accounts of the disciples being caught in a storm – once with Jesus in the boat, and this occasion without him.

The sea in this account is like that troubled sea. First, there is darkness all over, the darkness of sin. God made the world a very beautiful habitat for humanity. But sin marred and destroyed its beauty. Now it is full of corruptions, immorality, chaos, greediness, sorrows and all kinds of evil. Second, there is the great wind of evil forces. Satan and his cohorts have only one objective in mind: the destruction of the world, the Church, and humanity.

The disciples were in the midst of the sea. The sea arose and the wind blew against them. They faced a dilemma: struggle to keep on floating or give up hope and sink down. They chose the former. With a good current, a boat, such as theirs was, could cover a mile every 30 minutes. But against the wind and the waves, setting out just after sunset, they have only managed a few miles and were still struggling at 3am. They were physically exhausted. They were too far from the shore, they had struggled for a long time and their destination was nowhere in sight.

In the struggles we face, as we journey through life, sometimes it seems that we are too far away from a solution; we are physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually exhausted; the

difficulties we find ourselves facing seem too great, the little boats of our lives are just too small and we feel totally alone. The storm faced by the disciples appeared to dominate them, draining every ounce of energy and hope out of them. Sometimes that is how life feels for us and it feels like we are drowning, disappearing without a trace.

In the boat, everyone was doing their part. They each valued their own lives, and, I would have hoped, the lives of their fellow passengers. This past year has seen some wonderful moments where, despite the doom and gloom around us, people have pulled together to help get each other through these times. Communities have supported the vulnerable in their localities. Contributions to Foodbank have continued to flow in to meet local needs. Local and national recognition has been expressed towards those who are working on the front line, and the list of “key workers” and “critical workers” grows, as more and more are acknowledged for the part they play in keeping communities safe, healthy, and cared for in so many ways.

For the disciples in the boat, as hope seems to be dwindling, the unimaginable happens. In **verses 19 and 20** we read: ***“..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.’”*** As children or as adults, we would avidly watch westerns, as cowboys and Indians fought each other, you could rest assured that very soon, there would be a bugle call and the cavalry would arrive, just in the nick of time. Even in the Lord of the Rings trilogy and the Hobbit, those moments in the heat of battle or struggle when the giant eagles would sweep in to rescue our heroes, when Gandalf appeared with forces to help against the Orcs. We all like a good ending, rooting for the underdog, secretly, if not openly cheering when victory is clutched from the jaws of defeat. No bugle sound, no great army, just Jesus, walking on the water towards the boat – ***“and they [the disciples] were frightened..”***

Understandably so. Despite the fact that they had seen Jesus exercise his miraculous powers earlier that day and in recent days. You do not expect to see human figures walking in the middle of a storm in the middle of the sea. Before Jesus calmed their fears and stilled their storm, He came to them. Then speaking, he said: ***‘It is I; don’t be afraid.’*** The literal translation of what Jesus said is “I AM; don’t be afraid.” From **Exodus 3 verse 14**, we read that this is the name by which God makes himself known to Moses, a title of steadiness and power. Max Lucado writes: ***“When we wonder if God is coming, he answers with his name, “I AM!” When we wonder if he is able, he declares “I AM!” When see nothing but darkness, feel nothing but doubt, and wonder if God is near or aware, the welcome answer from Jesus is this “I AM!””***

In **Isaiah 43** we read: ***“But now, this is what the LORD says... ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;.....⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you;....”***

Then Jesus got into the boat with them and they reached their destination safely. Whereas Matthew and Mark record that as soon as Jesus got into the boat, the storm died down, John makes no such mention. Whether it did, or didn’t, the presence of Jesus was enough to calm their fears. As the old Sunday School chorus says “With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm, as we go sailing home.”

In all honest, we would probably much prefer to be spared the storms which come our way, or if they do come, that they are quickly over with. But when they do come, and don’t go quickly, Jesus wants us to be assured, “I AM with you.” Someone once told me, “when the outlook looks bad, try the uplook.” Don’t try to weather the storms alone. Many years ago, when cassette tapes were the medium for music, I used to listen to the songs of a Swedish Christian singer called Evie Tornquist, who later married and became Evie Karlsson. One of her songs had these lyrics:

When I think I'm going under, part the waters, Lord
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea
When I cry for help, oh, hear me, Lord and hold out Your hand
Touch my life Still the raging storm in me

*Knowing You love me, through the burdens I must bear
Hearing Your footsteps, lets me know I'm in Your care
And in the night of my life, You bring the promise of day
Here is my hand, show me the way*

When I think I'm goin' under, part the waters Lord
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea
When I cry for help, oh, hear me Lord and hold out Your hand
Touch my life, and still the raging storm in me

*Knowing You love me, helps me face another day
Hearing Your footsteps, drives the clouds and fears away
And in the tears of my life, I see the sorrow You bore
Here is my pain, heal it once more*

*When I think I'm goin' under, part the waters Lord
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea
When I cry for help, oh, hear me Lord and hold out Your hand
Touch my life, and still the raging storm in me*

We may, as it were, continue to “paddle our boats”, bailing the water out, trying to make the best of a difficult situation, whilst becoming more hopeless, more exhausted, more feeling alone and isolated, allowing the storm to dominate us. Believe that we are never alone and that even in the midst of life’s storms, we can experience the presence and miraculous power of God in our lives, the power of the Creator in our lives and circumstances. This is his promise to us each.