

23rd June 2024 – Morning Service
Jesus calms a storm & Sanctuary Sunday
Margaret Bradley

Call to Worship - Venite

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

StF 113 – O worship the King

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| 1) O Worship the King, all-glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise. | 4) Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain. |
| 2) O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath the deep
thunder-clouds form,
And dark is his path on the wings of the storm. | 5) Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
Your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend. |
| 3) The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
Established it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea. | 6) O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
While angels delight to hymn you above,
Your humbler creation, though feeble our praise,
With true adoration our voices we raise. |

Robert Grant

Prayer of Adoration

Awesome God, the vast universe declares your glory. You created the earth, with its skies, seas and dry land, full of energy and movement. You are sovereign of the winds, waves and all the forces of nature. The rushing wind, the pouring rain, the flashing lightening, the rumbling thunder, the pounding sea, you made them all. Sometimes they frighten, sometimes they fascinate and delight us. You are a powerful God and we can see you at work in nature. But as we now worship you, in the presence of your Holy Spirit, show us your care and love, displayed in Jesus, as well as your power.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we call upon you as we own our failures in obedience; our failures in love and service; our failures in faith. Have patience with us when we find it hard to trust in your promises, when we accuse you of not being aware of our problems. Come to us to reassure us of your eternal presence and love, calm our fears and fill us with your peace, as we claim your promised forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect for the day

Creator God, in the beginning your word subdued the chaos; and in the fullness of time you sent Jesus, your Son, to rebuke the forces of darkness and to make all things new. By that same power, transform our fear into faith, that we may have courage to follow in the way of your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 624 – Calm me Lord

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
Still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
Still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
Enfold me, Lord, enfold me in your peace.

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Reading: Job 38: 1-11

[Job challenges God for not coming to his aid in his afflictions. God responds by overwhelming Job with a poetic picture of God's divine power and wisdom.]

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: 'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt"?''

Responsive Psalm 107:23-32

Those who go down to the sea in ships and ply their trade in great waters,

These have seen the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.

For at his word the stormy wind arose and lifted up the waves of the sea.

They were carried up to the heavens and down again to the deep; their soul melted away in their peril.

They reeled and staggered like a drunkard and were at their wits' end.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.

He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were calmed.

Then were they glad because they were at rest, and he brought them to the haven they desired.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and the wonders he does for his children.

Let them exalt him in the congregation of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.

Reading: Mark 4: 35-41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 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?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'

Reflection – 'Peace! Be Still!' says Jesus

Jesus lived by a busy lake, so large that it was called the Sea of Galilee. One of the main occupations was catching fish and selling them on to others. Some of Jesus' best friends and disciples were fishermen. One evening Jesus persuaded a small flotilla of vessels to row with him to the other side of the lake. This meant leaving their familiar surroundings and people they knew very well and going to somewhere that was unfamiliar and where there were people they didn't know. Suddenly a storm blew up. A gale-force wind began to blow down the lake. The disciples travelling with Jesus became afraid that their fragile boat would sink. Their Teacher had fallen asleep, so the fearful disciples called on him to wake up, just as their ancestors had called upon God to wake up when they were in trouble and it seemed that God had ceased

to watch over them and was asleep. For example, in Psalm 44:23: *'Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake. Do not cast us off for ever.'* Jesus wakes up, stills the storm and quietens the water, telling them to have faith. Peace comes from trusting in him. This became a parable of discipleship within the life of the Christian community, which buoyed them up to keep trusting when things were tough. Jesus encouraged his disciples to go out of their comfort zone and it seemed that he was leading them into risk and trouble. The early church endured difficulties as they carried out their mission. Jesus seemed to be asleep and unaware of their storms, but, like the disciples in the boat, they are not to fear. The church will not be engulfed. Jesus would protect and save it, even as it was being buffeted by waves of persecution and suffering. He would arise and deal with all the forces arrayed against them.

The World Council of Churches was formed 76 years ago, as Christians of different denominations were moved to meet together, united by their common belief that 'Jesus is Lord' and in their commitment to work together for peace and justice in situations of conflict and where the weak are being exploited. Their logo is a storm-tossed boat, with a cross as its mast. It symbolises the way in which we can be reassured by the knowledge that, no matter how powerful the forces are against us, Christ is with us when we have the courage to step out and take risks of faith.

This story contains universal truths. It's not something that happened once, but which still happens and can happen for us. In the presence of Jesus, we can have peace in the wildest storms of life. The first disciples were honest in doubting that this could be so. Jesus may sometimes appear to be asleep to us, as we pass through rough seas and turbulence in our personal lives. But he IS with us. Sometimes we have to move on to unfamiliar things and we get worried about it. Sometimes storms unexpectedly blow up, things that we weren't expecting, and we feel alone, we can't cope, we're going under, we're sinking. Like the disciples we may be afraid of dying. But Jesus says to us, as he said to them, 'Have faith. I am with you. I can bring peace and calm into your situation. Trust me.' It's OK to call out to Jesus when we're frightened. It may seem as if he's asleep and unaware of your situation. But he IS with you and there's no need to be afraid.

In the words of the song written for the musical 'Carousel', covered by people such as Elvis Presley and Gerry and the Pacemakers, which is sung by football fans and in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic: *'When you walk through the storm hold you head up high and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm is a golden sky and the sweet silver song of the lark. Walk on, through the wind. Walk on, through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone. You'll never walk alone.'* (Oscar Hammerstein II).

StF 628 – Faithful One

Faithful One, so unchanging	You are my Rock in times of trouble
Ageless One, You're my Rock of peace.	You lift me up when I fall down.
Lord of all I depend on You	All through the storm
I call out to You again and again.	Your love is the anchor
I call out to You again and again.	My hope is in You alone.

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Reflection – 'Do you not care that we are perishing?' cry the people in the boat

Just 12 months ago there were two terrible tragedies at sea. In one, on 18 June, five extremely wealthy tourists died when a submersible vessel which was taking them to visit the shipwreck of the 'Titanic' imploded in the North Atlantic. This was despite the family of one of them, who was a British billionaire, saying that they 'had great faith and trust in the rescuers' when a massive international search operation was mounted. Four days earlier, on 14 June, around six hundred refugees drowned in the Mediterranean Sea when their boat, a fishing trawler called 'Adriana', capsized. These were mostly women and children, from Pakistan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Egypt and Syria.

Both voyages ended in a heartbreaking loss of life. But the vast differences between them prompted me to submit a question to the Radio 4 'Any Questions' programme which came to Kingswinford on the following Friday evening. It was not one of those chosen to be put to the panel, but it was, 'Are the lives of 600 refugees worth less than the lives of 5 deep-sea tourists?' There were striking contrasts in the way that these tragedies were reported in the media, in the responses of governments, and in the huge amount of effort and taxpayers' money that was devoted in trying to rescue the tourists, while the refugees were left to drown. This starkly highlighted the inequalities we accept in a world, created by God, who made us all as sisters and brothers and who requires from us justice and compassion.

Today is Sanctuary Sunday and the last day in Refugee Week. The challenges of immigration are increasingly a global concern as countries, including our own, are seeking to create more hostile environments to try and discourage people from leaving their own lands. When the Deputy Leader of the Reform UK Party was asked recently by an interviewer if he would let migrants drown in the Channel, he replied, 'Absolutely'. As this becomes one of the major issues in the coming General Election, we each have it in our power to be like Jesus and offer calm and stability in the storm. Inhumane proposals are not acceptable solutions for us to offer people who are determined to escape desperate situations by trying to find a place of sanctuary or a more sustainable place to live. Our friend Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal, former President of Methodist Conference and a local boy who attended Vicar Street Bible Class in Dudley founded by Bert Bissell, is active in encouraging churches to become welcoming places of sanctuary and he has written this prayer for today:

Migrant God, free from borders, your presence spans all creation. You take sanctuary in us, in you is our eternal sanctuary. We behold you in community with those uprooted from their homes by war, poverty, persecution and extreme weather, especially those who make their way to these shores on small boats. Be the shelter of their lives. Bless their courage and resilience in seeking freedom and sanctuary. Bring us to build cultures of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary for all; community where there is conflict; compassion where there is cruelty; humanity where there is hatred; hospitality where there is hostility. And so, to practice and proclaim hope. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

StF 625 – Deep in the darkness

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| 1) Deep in the darkness a starlight is gleaming,
Calling us out from the safety of home.
God of the questions, the mystery of dreaming,
Lighten our journey into the unknown. | 3) Still in the darkness we search for your healing,
Hoping for meaning to comfort our fear.
God of the silence, of unspoken feeling,
Teach us the wisdom to make your truth clear. |
| 2) Out of the darkness the voices are crying,
Terror and fear screaming loud in the night.
God of the hurting, of innocence dying,
Fire us with anger to struggle for right. | 4) On through the darkness we follow your leading,
Searching for joy and a refuge to stay.
God of our longing, the bliss we are seeking,
Journey with us to the brightness of day. |

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Reflection – 'Who is this man?' ask the disciples

The position of Lake Galilee, at 700 feet below sea level, makes it subject to storms caused by sudden inrushes of cold wind rushing down the valleys around the lake, which stir up the waters. It's not unusual today for violent storms to blow up suddenly and cease as quickly as they began. So, too, in Jesus' day, a squall followed by a sudden calm wouldn't be out of the ordinary and there may have been a non-miraculous explanation for this stilling of a storm. But that's not how the Gospel writers understood it. It was a sign pointing to who Jesus was. Mark invites his readers to ask themselves the question uttered by the disciples, 'Who then is this? Who is this man?' We think of winds and seas as impersonal forces, but to Mark's readers they would be manifestations of the power of demons. Jesus has the power to reduce demons of the storm to obey him. When he reprimanded the wind, a great calm descended.

There was a widespread notion that the act of creation involved God in a desperate, but finally victorious, contest with the forces of chaos and evil, which were located in the waters of the sea. As a result, the ability to control the sea and to subdue tempests was regarded as a characteristic sign of God's power. 'You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.' (Psalm 89:9). The ability to calm and subdue chaos, seas and storms was a sign of God's power. The only one who could give orders which would be obeyed would be God. The disciples of Jesus were filled with awe when he calmed a storm and they came to conclusion that they must be in the presence of one who was divine, that Jesus was God's Son. Do YOU believe this?

StF 322 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

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| 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away our fear. | 4) Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring. |
| 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest. | 5) Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought. |
| 3) Dear name - the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place,
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace! | 6) Till then I would thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath;
And may the music of thy name
Refresh my soul in death. |

John Newton

Giving Thanks

We thank you, O God, because you are gracious. You have loved us from the beginning of time, and you remember us in times of trouble and of joy. We thank you, O God, for coming to us in Jesus, truly human and truly divine, living and dying to show us your nature, and to raise us with him to new life. We thank you, O God, for sending your Holy Spirit, to teach and to guide us, and for the Spirit's activity in the work of the Church and the life of the world. And we thank you, O God, for all the blessings we receive day by day, and for the assurance that we will never walk alone. Your mercies endure for ever.

Prayers of Concern

We offer our prayers for the life of your universal church. We commit to you the World Council of Churches and all who are affiliated to it. We remember today the Church of Sanctuary Movement as it encourages church communities to stand in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers and to create safe spaces for those who are made vulnerable by their need to seek sanctuary.

We pray for the Methodist Church in our own land as representatives gather in Leeds next Thursday for the Annual Conference. Guide them as they make difficult decisions about the future of the church and bless those who will be ordained into the ministry. We pray for the congregations in our neighbourhood and in our Circuit. May all Christians serve you with reverence and joy, and have the vision and the courage to take new steps in mission and outreach. Lord, hear our prayer; come and listen to us.

We pray that the calm and stability of peace with justice may descend on all areas of chaos in the world - in Ukraine, Niger, Sudan, Myanmar and in Israel/Palestine. We pray for all those working with others in storms of conflict, carrying out delicate negotiations between hostile peoples. We pray that we may seek a world where all live in freedom, dignity and peace. Lord, hear our prayer; come and listen to us.

We hold before you all who are employed at sea – in the navy, crews of merchant ships bringing food and commodities from overseas, those in the fishing industry, those who work on oil rigs, coast guards, lifeguards, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, Air Sea Rescue, and for those on cruise liners. We pray for their safety and protection in storms. Lord, hear our prayer; come and listen to us.

We pray for those trying to flee from impossible situations to find a new start in another country. For those who will climb into inflatable boats, taking their children to seek safety, but face uncertain arrivals. Bring them safely to the other side. We pray that compassionate and workable solutions might be found to break very powerful gangs and organisations which put people's lives at risk. And we commit to you those men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life. Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished. Lord, hear our prayer; come and listen to us.

We pray for those who are buffeted, troubled and storm-tossed in their personal and family lives. For all who are worried and anxious, distressed and afraid. For those who feel that they cannot cope. For those who are concerned about a relative or friend who is ill or dying. Comfort all who are hurting, strengthen those who are weak and reassure those who are fearful. Lord, hear our prayer; come and listen to us. Creator God. you are constantly bringing into being that which was not. Calm the storms of stress and anxiety in our lives, that, trusting in you, we may have faith to walk confidently among the doubts and uncertainties of an unbelieving world, challenging it with your Gospel, that, at the end, our work complete, we may come safely home. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 645 – Will your anchor hold

1) Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*Ch) We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

2) Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
When the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?

3) Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil:

4) Will your eyes behold through the morning light
The city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly-shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?

Priscilla Jane Owens

Blessing

The blessing of God be with you when all is calm. The blessing of Christ be with you in the storms of life so that you will not drift from your course. The blessing of the Spirit be with you at all times. **Amen.**

Go now, in faith, so that others might see Christ in you and come to glorify God.