

Wednesday reflection by David Kennedy

When Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ A windstorm suddenly arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves, but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a dead calm. ²⁷ They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" *Matthew 8.23-27*

Jesus has just been challenging would-be disciples that there was a sense of urgency in his call to follow him. They had to respond immediately, without delay. Sadly, many didn't. So, Jesus leaves the crowds and gets into a boat, and to their credit, disciples like Peter and Andrew and James and John followed him and got into the boat with him. But as they crossed the Lake, suddenly, a great gale arose, something not uncommon in that climate. But the Greek word *gale* is related to *earthquake* and the boat was becoming swamped. This was severe. But I think we are meant to see deeper significance in this storm. Yes, the waves were very high, the boat was being overwhelmed, but those disciples, all of whom were experienced fishermen, must have known such conditions well. This storm is revelatory, a theophany or unveiling of something. The storm is pointing beyond itself.

Strangely, Jesus, in the boat, is asleep. It's hard to fathom how anyone could sleep in the face of such a storm. So the disciples cry out in sheer panic - 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' But Jesus awakes and rebukes them for their reaction - 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?'. And Jesus then rebukes - the verb is also used of exorcisms, the wind and the sea. And the storm was hushed and there was a dead calm.

I'm interested by Jesus' sleep. We can of course, make pious comments about Jesus having peace in the midst of the storm. But is the Lord's sleep saying something much more profound? That God is in the storm; that Jesus' sleep is a kind of sign? The storm isn't therefore malevolent. It is revelatory. There was no way that the boat would sink, that the disciples and Jesus would drown. So, what is the storm and Jesus' sleep saying to us?

Is the Lord's sleep a symbol of prayer? For there is a close connection between sleep and prayer - both involve a letting go. Jesus often prayed during the night - so did prayer and sleep somehow inter-twine? Many Anglican Christians love the late evening office of Compline or Night Prayer. It is best said just before retiring. It is about a letting go, a giving of ourselves into the Father's hands, having made our peace with God and our neighbour. If the disciples could but just see - notice - they might perceive that at the heart of everything, at the heart even of the storm, is the

One who never changes; the one even while apparently asleep, is always sustaining the world and all creation. Perhaps the exorcising of the wind and the stilling of the waves is the secondary miracle to the mystery of the Lord's sleep. This is theophany – the revealing of the true nature of the Son of God, the God who is revealed in the storm and in the sleep. And from the disciples' mouths comes the question that Matthew the evangelist asks us to answer 'What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?' What is *your* heart saying to that question today?

Whenever you are tempted to take your gaze off the One whose still and awesome presence is at the very heart and centre of existence, even as the waves are crashing over the ship, then read the storm on the lake.