

Mark 4: 35-41

You're going to learn quite a bit about me and my sermon writing process in the weeks to come. I start my reading at least a week out and I pray and sift and examine what various authorities have to say on the lections for the day. You are going to hear about of my favourite spiritual writers. This process brings me to the place of my **learning edge** and that is what I have to offer. I don't go to the computer to search previous sermons on the text because that would only reveal what I had learnt in the past. The current Bishop of Gippsland a wise mentor of mine said me "Linda we preach first to ourselves". I have those words ringing in my heart and mind I approach my task waiting to see what God is shaping in me as I prepare.

This gospel reveals a scene that can be examined on multiple levels. There is the safe and comfortable one that looks at the issue of faith and trust and a darker one that focuses on pain and struggle.

Perhaps this is a timely gospel for a pandemic. We should trust and be unafraid of the face of uncertainty. Put our focus on Jesus all will be well. On one level, this gospel is a parable of discipleship. It is a metaphor for difficult times. We all know that personal circumstances change quickly, and we can find ourselves with wind and waves battering our metaphorical boat. We can identify with feelings of loneliness and isolation and the questions: does the mighty powerful creator of the universe know me and my troubles? Does God have the power to change this situation?

In the gospel the sea responds to Jesus' double command: Be silent, be still! Then he asks the disciples "**Have you no faith?**" This question is directed squarely at us. Just like the disciples in the boat, we have a choice to make. We can reach toward the **Kingdom of God that Jesus actualized**, or we can slide into the profane world, the one that doesn't recognise God. So how do we respond to Jesus' question?

If we want to have faith we need to go about living in the moment in **order to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit**. It is easy to resort to platitudes and trite statements when it comes to summoning the voice to answer “**I have faith**”. But, I need to be honest and say to Jesus “I stumble and I fail”. Too often I let the worries of the ordinary world press in on me.

Here is where this gospel can lead us into deep personal questions; it is also the place where we can engage with God’s kingdom in such a way that we are slowly enabled to turn from fear to faith.

At this point I want to introduce you to Daniel O’Leary a distinguished academic theologian and priest of over 30 years. His writing is down to earth. I have been reading two of his books side by side. One is titled *An Astonishing Secret: The Love Story of Creation and The Wonder of You*. This book offers 49 reflections on Pope Francis’ creative writings. It is a book that exudes the love of God as seen in creation and every aspect of the universe. It is thoroughly inspiring in its scope. I have never read anything more positive or joyous.

The second book is *Dancing To My Death with the love called cancer*. Both of these books can be taken in small doses or bite size sections. I put them down and when I am looking for profound insight, I go back to them.

In part, a book with death in its title may seem off-putting but its message is compelling. O’Leary documents his experience of terminal illness. He does this within the context of a fierce faith in God’s love. He explains that in this age of technology he aims “to explore the ever increasing love-energy and craftsmanship of the Holy Spirit”. He offers a prayer of Teilhard De Chardin, a scientist and priest saying: “I want to fall on my knees and say Lord Jesus you who are as gentle as the human heart, as fiery as the forces of nature, as intimate as life itself, you in whom I can melt away, and with whom I

must have mastery and freedom: I love you as a world which has captivated my heart and it is you I now realise, that my fellow humans, even those who do not believe sense and see through the magic immensities of the cosmos.” O’ Leary says the very sweep and swirl of this prayer, the space and the freedom of it, the cosmic bigness and yet the personal intimacy of it – I think must surely heal my tumour and my mind before my world grows too dark.”

I am drawn to O’Leary’s writing because he gives a clear, slow revelation of our life’s task. That is, to work out who we are in relation to the Kingdom of God. Yes, we need trust and faith, but we are not alone in the work. This **does not mean** that the work is always easy! O’Leary’s writing aims reveal true intimacy with God. This is a warts and all story of an authentic struggle. I haven’t finished to book yet as I take it in small bites.

These are sobering thoughts. On one level of a parable about discipleship seems straightforward as we see the essence of God’s mission in the world distilled into one scene. The world’s death-dealing forces including nature are no match for the power of the Kingdom of God. This story also foreshadows Jesus’ death and resurrection. On another level it draws us into deep questioning. So what do we take from this story? Jesus is a bringer of calm. In situations of fear and disorientation we can trust in his words: Peace! Be Still!

AMEN

Linda Fiske 20.6.21

References

Daniel O’Leary, *An Astonishing Secret the love story of creation and the wonder of you* Columbia Press Dublin 2017

Daniel O’Leary *Dancing To My Death with the love called cancer* Columbia Books Dublin 2019

