

Reading: Mark 4:35-41
Theme: “Calming Storms”

- Good morning!
[Introduce myself, my family, my job, my connection with TCE, building a house in Vlijmen].
Thank you so much for your kind invitation to take the service and share a message with you this morning, which is very special to me in the church I was baptised and confirmed. It is wonderful to see a number of familiar faces! It also gives me the opportunity to finally say a big “thank you” to all of you for so faithfully supporting the work of the Mission to Seafarers in the Port of Rotterdam, both in your giving and in prayer. We are so grateful and thankful for your generosity. Your giving makes a real difference! And besides delving into our Gospel passage and focussing on Jesus, my sermon this morning will focus on this very diverse group of people I have the privilege of serving in the Port of Rotterdam: seafarers.
[Share a few key stats about the Port of Rotterdam!]
- It’s great to be with you this morning as we celebrate **our seafaring friends** together in a **Sea Sunday**-style service! We’ll be taking a closer look at this well-known passage at the end of Mark 4 where “Jesus calms the storm”.
- Let’s briefly look at where we’ve landed in Mark’s Gospel.
[Context!] We see that Jesus is very popular! Huge crowds are following him and want to see him in action. We read that, “many people came to Jesus from Judea,

*Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon”, “when they **heard** all he was **doing**” (3:8). This crowd that has travelled in from afar is now keen to **see** all that Jesus is **doing**.*

- And where is Jesus at this moment? Jesus is with his disciples, sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, teaching a large crowd. We read at the start of Mark 4 that: “*Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge.*” It is **so** busy, **so** crowded that as The Message Translation puts it, Jesus had to “*use the boat as a pulpit*” (v.1). Jesus had already anticipated this sheer busyness: “*Because of the large crowd Jesus told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him*” (3:9). What an inventive move! It meant Jesus could reach **so** many more people, than if he were standing amidst the large crowd pressing in.
- And so, we arrive at our passage for today as Jesus is sitting in the boat, speaking to his disciples, the Twelve, his intimate group of followers. Now, I’d like us to explore four questions that arise from this passage that offer hope, comfort and peace in times of raging storms, not just for Jesus’ disciples, but for all of us during this current global pandemic with all of its challenges and restrictions, but also in particular for those we remember and honour today: **the seafarers**. What’s the Good News in this passage that can help us when “*a furious storm*” arises? Let’s explore these four questions together. First of all:

1) Change: Shall we go?

- “*That day when evening came, [Jesus] 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**" (vv.35-36).

- Jesus had had a long day of teaching, both to the Twelve and to the large crowd that had gathered to see Him. And so at the end of the day, in the evening, Jesus turn to his disciples and says: "**Let us go over to the other side**" (v.35). This leads to our first question: "**Shall we go?**"
- It's not entirely clear from the passage why Jesus wanted to go and change their current setting. Perhaps it was to escape the large crowd, perhaps it was to expand his ministry on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. We just don't know for sure.
- What we do know is that *Jesus* suggested it and that his disciples, including several fishermen who were skilled sailors, "**took him along, just as he was**" (v.36), meaning Jesus remained seated in the boat, and they left the crowd behind standing on the shore.
- On their Teacher's suggestion, his twelve followers and Jesus set out on a boating trip across the Sea of Galilee; Jesus felt it was time for a **change**.
- **Seafarers** have to deal with change all the time: change of port, meaning change of culture, customs and language, change of crew, change of cargo, change of hours, change of role, change of contract, change of vessel, maybe even change of pay...
- We're all constantly dealing with change in our lives; some less permanent, like your commute to work being disrupted, some more permanent, like getting married, having a child, moving home, changing jobs. Change can leave us feeling anxious and restless.
- Some of us might currently feel like we're at cross roads, unsure of what the future holds and perhaps fearful of choosing the wrong path. I believe the *disciples* must have felt the same way at times. They

followed their Teacher and I'm sure they wouldn't have joined Him on this little boating trip if they had known in advance that their life might have been in great danger?

Change: Shall we go?

2) Love: Don't you care?

- "**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?'**" (vv.37-38).
- Happy sailing on the Sea of Galilee has turned into a fight for your life expedition, which the disciples must have been really thankful for, since it was *Jesus* who suggested they "**go over to the other side**" (v.35) as we just explored. That's just great! They're in this mess, because they had obeyed Jesus, their Rabbi, their Teacher. And so, the disciples were encountering a real crisis and had entered panic mode. Suddenly "**a furious squall**" (v.37), "**a furious storm**" (Luke 8:22) had come up and "**waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped**" (v.37). The boat was filling up quickly which left them "**in great danger**" according to Luke's account in Luke 8:23. By now the disciples, including some very skilled **seafarers**, were gripped by fear, in survival mode, convinced they were going to drown in the Sea of Galilee.
- Now just to set the scene a bit more. The Sea of Galilee is not a real sea; it's Israel's largest freshwater lake, also known as Lake Galilee or Lake Tiberias. It's about 21 km long and 13 km wide and the river Jordan flows through it from north to south. Due to its low-lying position in the valley, about 200 metres below sea level, surrounded by mountains, Lake Galilee was

– and still is – well-known for sudden furious storms arising, just like the one we read about in today's passage.

- And amidst this chaos of raging winds, massive waves, water pouring into the boat, the drenched disciples probably yelling at each other, writing their Last Will, the boat is sinking... what is Jesus doing?
- Jesus is asleep in the stern (the back) of the boat! And he's not just enjoying any sleep; he's "*sleeping on a cushion*" (v.38). That offers extra neck support! Moreover, Jesus had physically removed himself from the rest of his disciples by retreating to the back of the boat. It meant he would have been able to enjoy a deep and peaceful sleep. What is *astonishing* – and the disciples certainly found it astonishing enough to wake him – is that Jesus has been sleeping through the entire episode of the raging storm!
- And so the soaked, fearful and understandably upset disciples wake their Teacher and say: "*Teacher, **don't you care** if we drown?*" (v.38). Our second question: "***don't you care?***" They're basically saying: "You've hand-picked each one of us. We've devoted our lives to you. Don't you **care** if we die? Don't you **love** us?"
- **Seafarers** can feel like this. Life at sea is often lonely, difficult and dangerous with long anti-social hours and the risk of shipwreck, piracy, or other accidents. Their profession (including fishermen) is rated the second most dangerous job in the world, only surpassed by underwater welders!
- Some of us might currently feel like we're in the midst of a storm and nobody seems to care or notice what we're going through. I believe the *disciples* felt the same way. We'll see in a moment that Jesus decides to respond with love and care. He doesn't let his disciples drown; Jesus deeply loves us.

Love: Don't you care?

3) Trust: Where's your faith?

- "***Jesus 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?**'*" (vv.39-40).
- Jesus' response to his disciples' rebuking him, is **not** to rebuke *them*, but to rebuke the wind and the waves. A very human Jesus who has until moments ago been enjoying a peaceful sleep, now shows his true divinity as he demonstrates his sovereignty over creation: "***Jesus got up**, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind **died down** and it was **completely calm**.*"
- Suddenly the Lord of *all* Creation is standing amidst the disciples. Jesus turns to them and says: 'Why are you so afraid? **Do you still have no faith?**'" (v.40).
- Luke's recording of this story, in Luke 8:25, holds our third question: "***Where's your faith?***" (Luke 8:25).
- Jesus' response to his disciples indicates that the Twelve should have had *faith* rather than *fear*. If the Son of God, the Lord of all Creation is beautifully asleep on a cushion while a furious storm is raging, what should we be doing as followers of Jesus, who are keen to become ever more like Him? But it feels near impossible to be asleep when a storm is raging!
- **Seafarers** often find themselves far away from home, often sailing to countries where they don't speak the language and don't know the culture. Experiencing every type of weather on one transatlantic crossing. This can make them feel vulnerable and fearful.
- Some of us might currently feel our faith has slowly dwindled. Life's challenges and disappointments have taken its toll on our faith. I believe the *disciples* must have felt the same way at times. They show a very understandable and human response in times of real crisis! It seems so unreasonable for Jesus to say "*Why*

are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v.40).
What Jesus is actually saying, is: I've got your back,
'cause I deeply love you. I won't let you sink. Trust me.

Trust: Where's your faith?

4) Awe: Who is this?

- "They were **terrified** and asked each other, '**Who is this? Even** the wind and the waves obey him!'" (v.41).
- Matthew records: "The men were amazed" (Mt 8:27) and Luke records "fear and amazement" (Lk 8:25).
- The disciples witnessed something truly majestic and amazing, as their seemingly hopeless situation of impending death is completely turned around.
- What just happened? The Twelve still didn't understand who Jesus *really* was. And we see that in Mark's Gospel the mystery of who Jesus is, continues until his death and resurrection and even beyond.
- However, as the Message Translation puts it: "They were in absolute **awe**, staggered" (v.41 MSG). There was a real understanding that somehow the divine had met them in *their* Teacher in this boat on the Sea of Galilee. And so they ask the awe-inspired question, our fourth question: "**Who is this? (v.41).**"
- Now Mark recorded this crucial, yet rhetorical question, which he has already answered right at the start of his Gospel in Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus **Christ**, the **Son of God**" (1:1).
- "Who is this?" (v.41) invites a response of awe and faith, saying: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."
- The disciples' awe is further amplified by using the word "even": "**Even** the wind and the waves obey him!" (v.41). They had witnessed Creation bowing down before "Jesus Christ, the Son of God", although they might not yet have fully realised who Jesus was.
- **Quote:** A Roman philosopher and politician said:

"We should give God the same place in our hearts that he holds in the universe."

- **Seafarers** get to travel the world, which is often the main motivation to becoming a seafarer (that and the pay). I met up with a Christian seafarer onboard his vessel, who spoke about his sense of awe and wonder of God's creation as he sailed across the seas.
- Some of us might currently feel like we've lost that sense of awe and wonder for our Creator God. I believe the *disciples* must have felt the same way at times. They were both amazed and afraid as they witnessed the unfolding of this supernatural event in front of their eyes that **must** have boosted their relationship with their Lord.

Awe: Who is this?

Conclusion

- We've explored four key questions that arise from this passage as Jesus calms the storm. Just as Jesus offered love, hope, comfort and peace to his disciples during the raging storm, He offers the same to **our seafaring friends**, and to you and me as we seek help, guidance and direction in life.
- One verse I hadn't yet touched upon, which is easy to miss, but makes all the difference, is at the end of v.36: "There were also other boats with him" (v.36). Matthew doesn't record this, nor does Luke in their accounts of Jesus calming the storm. But *Mark* records it. What does this mean? I believe it means two things:

1) Whatever **seafarers** are going through, whatever you and I are currently going through: we're not alone! There are other "boats in the same Lake".

2) When Jesus calms the storm, it doesn't just affect the disciples and the boat they're in; it affects **all the boats** on the lake going through the storm. Jesus is with us and with **our seafaring friends!**

- Let me close with a quote from Louisa May, author of the novel Little Women. She said: "I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship."
As we honour and celebrate **seafarers**, may all of us look towards the Captain of our ships, the Lord of our lives, as he helps us – day after day – to sail our ship.
Amen.