

"Take heart, it is I": Mark 6.45-56

Thanks to Robin for today's TFTD. The "Jesus Boat" at Ginosar (Gennesaret) is a 2000-year-old fishing boat, preserved in the mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Not a very robust craft to survive a storm!



You set off in your boat and the wind gets up and waves get higher and rowing suddenly becomes very hard work. Soon your arms feel like they will be pulled out of their sockets at any minute. And pain is shooting up your legs and across your back. And it is relentless. Because you can't stop rowing. And there is still a long way to go.

And how did we end up here in the first place? We went to the deserted place to get away from people and 5,000 of them showed up. And now we have to struggle back to civilisation to get somewhere to stay and something to eat. Why did I agree to this crazy idea? When did 'follow me' turn into 'go on ahead, I'll see you later'?

You keep rowing, the pain becomes unbearable and your heart hardens as you admonish yourself for being so stupid for allowing yourself to be talked into this horrible and seemingly never-ending situation.

I can't help but see the parallels with being a vicar in a pandemic. Close the church. Now open the church. Online services. Services on the telephone. Home visits. Thought for the Day. Sunday School. Toddler group. Planning for 'when this is all over'. Services on zoom. Meetings on zoom. More meetings on zoom. I can't sleep. Sometimes my brain feels like it is about to explode.

Luckily for my spiritual health I have friends, family and neighbours who work in schools, GP practices, care homes and food shops. I steal a quick glance from my boat and look at theirs and immediately see they have it tougher than me. Then there's bin men and delivery drivers and people working for vaccine manufacturers and for the test and trace services and so it goes on and on. The waves have been pretty high for all of us for some time and we have just kept rowing. So many of us are running on empty. We have got to the point where if one more thing goes wrong, we will just throw the oars up in the air and curl up and cry.

It's a ghost! Walking on the water! That's it! I'm done! I can't take any more! You're screaming. So is everybody else.

"Take heart. It is I."

He gets into the boat.

The wind immediately ceases.
The water is calm.

What is happening?

Nothing makes sense anymore.

And before we know it, we are back in Gennesaret. (I thought we were trying to get to Bethsaida?). Anyway, who cares? We moor the boat. Immediately he is recognised. A crowd forms. People start bringing their sick to him. And all who touch him are healed.

Everything's back to normal.

But it's a new normal.

Those of us who were in the boat will never forget the wind and the waves. Our aching muscles won't let us. We won't forget the pain and the fear.

And we won't forget the calm. And those words. "Take heart. It is I."

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