

Lee Abbey Retreat

Crossing an unknown sea

Reflection 4: Against the winds - faith in the dark

*Daily prayer of turning and away and towards –
to help us settle and focus.*

.... I turn to Christ. (see Reflection 1)



Today's reflection is on a story of struggling in the dark and when Jesus seems absent. In his famous hymn Cardinal Newman wrote of such a time:

Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me. Cardinal Newman

A prayer those going through such times now
Jesus who stopped the wind and stilled the waves
grant us calm in the storm times;
Jesus victor over death and destruction
bring us safely on your voyage;
Jesus of the purest love, perfect companion
bring guarding ones around us;
guide us finally ashore. Ray Simpson. Celtic Daily Light (adapted)

Reading: 'When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I, do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.' Jn 6.16-21

Notes

The Context

Previous chapter - Jesus teaches about his identity and authority. It is near Passover.

He now - crosses the sea to the other side

- goes up the mountain
- teaches
- provides miraculous food in a solitary place

Where else have we heard a story like that? Jesus the new Moses.

The crowds response – a King out of their needs and wishes.

Jesus withdraws.

'When evening came'

Where is he? Disciples give up waiting.

On the sea, against the wind without Jesus - faith in the dark

Rowan Williams: 'Jesus is hidden in our lives (as our lives are hidden in him). We would like our prayers to be a conscious communion with Jesus [but] experienced voices tell us that this is not often the norm. From time to time we are allowed a short, but fragile glimpse of what is really going on in us, but it may be in those times of dry loneliness of prayer that seems to be going nowhere, or in the frustration of life that feels as if it is losing direction, that God in Christ may be most fully alive.' (from Ponder these things. Canterbury p50)

Our walk is by faith not sight.

Jesus comes - walking on water

'They wanted to take him into the boat'.

But *immediately* they arrived on the other side.

'It is I' – literally 'I AM'./'Here I AM - the divine name.

'I AM' can never truly be absent.

'God is closer to me than I am to myself'. Augustine

'Where can I escape your presence?' Ps 139.7

'In him we live and move and have our being'. Acts 17.28

Those times of darkness and absence as tough love?

God's most loving way of weaning us off our attempts at control, our false securities, our misguided assumptions. We must lose these if we are to find what is true ...

Jesus's 'radical unavailability'.

But lives are hidden in Christ.

They got there!

'immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going'. v21

So will we - he will bring us home.

For reflection

Can you think of times when Jesus has felt absent or elusive? How did you respond? Where did you find support or wisdom in such times?

Can you imagine the elusiveness or (apparent) absence of Jesus as being his loving gift to you? Can you even think him for such times?

Speak to Jesus honestly out of your experience and struggles.

How do you respond to Walter Brueggemann's words?:

'We so are absorbed with God being for *us*, blessing *us*, meeting *our* needs, that we do not attend enough to his hiddenness'.

Praying in darkness and uncertainty.

Read Cardinal Newman's hymn again

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.
Thomas Merton: from Thoughts in Solitude

Jesus who stopped the wind and stilled the waves
grant you calm in the storm times;
Jesus victor over death and destruction
bring you safely on your voyage;
Jesus of the purest love, perfect companion
bring guarding ones around you;
guide you finally ashore.

Ray Simpson Celtic Daily Light (adapted)

For further reflection on the neglected subject of darkness in the journey of faith see Barbara Brown Taylor's *Learning to walk in the dark* (Canterbury: 2014).

davidruncorn@mac.com 2021