

A sermon by Canon Maggie Guite

Interruptions and Peace **Proper 7 B** **24/6/18**

2 Corinthians 6.1-13 **Mark 4.35-41**

Do you have a Phone in your bedroom?

It's very jangling to be woken by a phone shrilling. You may manage to collect wits to deal with an emergency – but afterwards, not surprisingly, if it seemed the call wasn't really necessary - reproach may be what comes out!

I wonder if it was something like this when Jesus woken in the boat. Perhaps not surprising that disciples reproached!

Like the disciples, we may wonder how he could sleep so deeply during a raging storm – but there may be two elements to the answer.... Sheer exhaustion, and a rather extraordinary level of faith and confidence.

Exhaustion first: Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus living a whirlwind of a life. Chapter after chapter we're told of the crowds pressing in – no time to eat, needing to get into a boat to avoid being crushed, repeated efforts to get somewhere away from the crowds for a break, only to be followed by those crowds around the shore of the lake. They'd be there when he disembarked, piteous, curious, expectant and *demanding*. In modern terms, we might compare it to the life of a celebrity – mobbed at every turn. But there was more – he was giving out all

the time. The story of the woman with the haemorrhage tells us that he experienced healing as a depletion of energy; and he was teaching all the time – and any teacher will tell you that that is tiring!

He also, we know, snatched time to be alone in prayer by going into the hills to pray all night. Prayer gives energy back, on one level, but on another, of course, the human craving for sleep will eventually assert itself.

No wonder Jesus was exhausted – and his close disciples, too. It seems that he sought to get away from the crowds for their sake as much as his own. And yet they were constantly interrupted.

No doubt, on the night of the storm, they were setting off to Gentile territory precisely to escape the crowds in his own community. So, Jesus was asleep – deeply asleep, no doubt exhausted. And we know that a very deep need for sleep does overcome even the anxieties and tensions of the mind sometimes – as was the case for the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But there was in Jesus also that element of faith and trust which allowed him to sleep in a storm, which seems almost unimaginable to most of us, as it did to his disciples. When he reproached them for lack of faith, he set bar high – as he already had in the parable of the mulberry tree which only a tiny little seed of faith would have no trouble in uprooting and throwing into the sea. From my perspective – perhaps from yours, too – one is tempted to say '*Really?*'

I haven't yet learned how to fall asleep when I'm full of anxiety. But I do know that the Scriptures and the tradition of Christian prayer over the centuries are invitations to us to grow into such a faith. Like all good things it has to come to God as a gift – but perhaps we open our hearts to then gift when we say something like psalm 4 – one of the compline psalms: I

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for it is you, Lord, only, who make me dwell in safety'. (Ps.4.8)

Could it be that Our Lord models for us a way of *learning* trust, because he had such an intimate knowledge and constant use of the Psalms? WE could say, he *inhabited* the Psalms for himself, and inhabits them still for us.

Certainly, when he reproached his disciples for lack of trust, there may have been another Psalm which he would like them to have known and believed in better:

*23 Those who go down to the sea in ships ◆
and ply their trade in great waters,
24 These have seen the works of the Lord ◆
and his wonders in the deep.
25 For at his word the stormy wind arose ◆
and lifted up the waves of the sea.
26 They were carried up to the heavens*

*and down again to the deep; ◆
their soul melted away in their peril.
27 They reeled and staggered like a drunkard ◆
and were at their wits' end.
28 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, ◆
and he brought them out of their distress.
29 He made the storm be still ◆
and the waves of the sea were calmed.
30 Then were they glad because they were at
rest, ◆
and he brought them to the haven they desired.*

(Psalm 107.23-30)

But let me just end with a few words about interruptions. Jesus' ministry shows a polarity in it between constant interruption, and frequent efforts to create space. And, as I have said, often even those attempts to find peace and rest, were foiled. At the end of this voyage across the lake, he was to arrive at Gennesaret, where he might have hoped for some peace and quiet among the green hills sloping to the water's edge. But immediately he was confronted with a madman, raving

among the tombs. And when the madman was delivered from his demons and sitting calmly at his feet, even then, peace and space was not available: the local inhabitants in fear and maybe resentment – because they'd lost their valuable pigs – pushed him away. He returned to the teeming shores of the Jewish side of the lake, where crowds awaited him again.

Many of us find ourselves interrupted – our plans and desires thwarted – by other. Sometimes, we achieve the space – the rest, the recreation we need and crave. But at other times it eludes us. When we're in this situation, remember that Jesus lived it, too. He wants the best for us, as he wanted the best for his close disciples, and he blesses the times of quietness, rest and reflection which we achieve, and those who aid us in finding them; but he also shows us how to deal with interruptions and the demands of other people's agendas with grace and creativity, even when we feel we can take no more.

Like St Paul, we're called to follow Jesus in lives which may sometimes be much more hectic and demanding than we'd like. The line in the hymn about 'our ordered lives' confessing 'the beauty of his peace', sometimes seems hollow!

But, at a deeper level, if we're growing through our experiences, and our closeness with Christ in them to be even a little bit more trusting, there is an order being constructed deep within our souls, and a peace which is growing, beyond human understanding. St Paul's life, as we were vividly reminded in our epistle, was hardly without event and accident! Yet something of God's order and beauty was growing in him. Like him, we can look forward to our final rest, when nothing will interrupt or distort our unclouded vision of God in Christ, seen face to face.

And meanwhile, perhaps even in this life, the day will come when we can sleep peacefully and trustingly in the midst of a storm!