



### **3rd Sunday after Trinity | Sermon – Revd Canon Stan Evans**

*‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him’*

On my bucket list before I leave this planet is to visit the Holy Land. I would love to head off on a Pilgrimage. Most people who visit are struck by the beauty and simplicity of Galilee, where Christianity was born. For many who visit tell of the most memorable time of their visit is a quiet walk along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or a boat trip between the lakeside towns. How wonderful that must be.

In the stillness you can hear the echo of so many of Jesus’ words which were spoken around the shores of the lake. The surrounding countryside gives you a sense of place for the many familiar stories about Jesus, and folk tell how faith and imagination can fill the deserted places with people who long to see Jesus. In a curious way, even though Galilee is like going home and discovering it for the very first time.

The real tragedy at the moment of course is that the Holy Land does not echo to peaceful sounds – bloodshed and conflict have turned it once again into a battleground and so they continue to crucify the one who walked and stood in their midst. If only they would listen to the one who has the answer.

After he left his home in Nazareth, Jesus settled in the town of Capernaum on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

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ANGLICAN PARISH  
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

Unlike Nazareth, which was isolated from the main roads, Jesus' new home was on the main route from Damascus to Egypt and would have served for a good base for his ministry. Capernaum was a customs post. Merchants and traders would have stopped there, no doubt exchanging goods and stories. For the locals, the warm climate and the fertile soil made for plentiful crops, including figs and grapes and of course olives. In addition to all the fruit growing and farming, the lake industries included trading, tanning, fishing and boat building. I hope you can see the picture.

Most of Jesus' ministry in Galilee was around the shores of the lake. He spoke of the sea, and the land around it. And the people who lived in the region. He used Peter's boat as his pulpit when the crowds became too large, and he crossed the lake many times – no doubt with Peter as his captain.

My first home in Ireland was overlooking a beautiful lake; I have always been very nervous of boats and water, but I succumbed to being the oarsman on one occasion when asked by my son to take him fishing. Half an hour out on the water – the wind changed and suddenly that small boat began to be tossed around.....I have never been so frightened. An experience which today's Gospel always reminds me of every time I read it.

In our Gospel Jesus suggests to his disciples that they cross the lake to the other side. The sun has set; soon it will be nightfall. The pressing crowds are left behind, but what lies ahead is no picnic.



The lake is normally calm, but because of its position – about seven hundred feet above sea level – it is subject to sudden windstorms which sweep down from the surrounding hills, rush through the narrow gorges that break upon the lake, and whip up the saucer like sea, this is what happens in today's Gospel: the rapid change of weather causes the waves to break into the boat so that it starts to fill.

In the midst of this chaos Jesus is fast asleep on the small bench at the back of the boat, his head on a cushion. The disciples have no intention of letting Jesus doze through a disaster; the boat is sinking and, perhaps like most fishermen, the disciples cannot swim to save their lives. They wake Jesus with an accusation:

***Master, do you not care? We are going down.***

Jesus wakes up, rebukes the wind and commands the sea to be quiet. After rebuking the tempest Jesus rebukes his disciples for their large fear and little faith. In the midst of the calm there arises the central question about Jesus: 'Who can this be?'

The question about Jesus' identity arises from seeing what Jesus actually does. People begin to wonder about whom Jesus is when they witness what he does. If everyone had been washed overboard, for example, the question would not have arisen. The question is posed; the answer, however, will be understood only after the resurrection.

We believe with St Mark that the answer to the question 'Who is this man?' is that we believe that he is the Son of God.

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The proclamation of the identity of Jesus is at the very heart of our Christian faith. But the question remains whether our faith in Jesus will stay with us even during threat and danger and storm. The experience of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee is a graphic one; they feel all at sea, they feel up to their neck in difficulty, they feel powerless to withstand the environment of threat. For sure, their experience is not alien to us.

Most certainly we believe that Jesus accompanies us on our journey to God, that he is 'on board' with us. Sometimes when we see such disorder and chaos around our world, we might wonder if Jesus has chosen to sleep through disaster – even though we know that his presence is no insurance against our own fear and anxiety. To journey with Jesus is to journey through storms and not around them. The peace of our Galilee will be disturbed. But we know that the disciples went on to face shipwreck and hardship and rejection. Ultimately, many of them came face to face with a violent death and martyrdom. What kept them going is what keeps us going: a strenuous belief that Jesus is Lord of all chaos, a stubborn faith which tells us that there is no storm that will not be stilled at last by the peace of his presence.

So often we feel that he is not listening to us, and we scream out as those disciples did in the boat. He is always in the shadows – always keeping an eye on us from the back of the boat, never ignoring our call, but answering very often in ways in which we might never had imagined.

Why are we afraid; faith overcomes fear – and he never fails us, never allows us to sink. Thanks be to God.

**Amen**