**Bamford and Norden URC June 20th 2021 led by Margaret Ogden**

**Order of Service**

**Call to worship**

Jesus on the boat in the storm said: ‘Peace! Be still!’…and there was a great calm.
We come to God, just as we are.
Sometimes at ease.
Sometimes confused by life’s storms.
Let us trust God with our big questions, and listen for God’s still small voice to restore us to a sense of peace.

**Hymn 1072 In Christ alone my hope is found**

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here, in the love of Christ, I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save
'Til on that cross, as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin, on him, was laid
Here, in the death of Christ, I live.

There in the ground, his body lay
Light of the world, by darkness, slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave, he rose again
And as he stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am his and he is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from his hand
'Til he returns or calls me home
Here, in the power of Christ, I stand

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**Prayers**

God of our ups and downs,
we come together in your name
with concerns in our hearts and questions in our minds,
with troubles in our lives and fears for our world.
We come trusting that you
share our concerns and hear our questions,
embrace our troubles and know our fears.
We come trusting that you never give up on us,
that you never abandon us, never dismiss us.
For you are a God of love, of peace, of power –
you are our God and
we praise and adore you for all that you are:
for being bigger than even our biggest questions;
for caring more than we can fully comprehend.
We praise and adore you
for your strength and your silence;
for your power and your peace.
We praise and adore you
for being in control and yet not controlling;
for being in the storms and beyond them.
We praise and adore you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we praise you for ever.

God of power and peace,
when the storm is raging:
**We thank you that You are there.**When our boats are sinking:
**We thank you that You are there.**When faith slips through our fingers:
**We thank you that You are there.**When our hearts sink and our courage fails:
**We thank you that You are there.**In the roar of the waves,
in the sound of the wind,
and in the silence:
**We thank you that You are there.**So, we praise you.
We thank you.
We worship you. And we ask you to forgive us when our faith is weak and we doubt your promises
In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

### **Reading - Mark 4;35-41 Jesus Calms the Storm**

**35**That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” **36**Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. **37**A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. **38**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?”

**39**He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

**40**He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

**41**They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

**Reflection A meditation of the Apostle John by Nick Fawcett**

**We were petrified, quite simply, scared out of our wits, for the wind and the waves grew fiercer by the minute, tossing our boat about like so much driftwood.**

**WE were taking water in by the bucket load and, frantically though we tried to bail it out, it was only a matter of time before we capsized.**

**What was Jesus doing , you ask? Well, believe it or not, he was sleeping!**

**I know it sounds crazy doesn’t it, and if you’re surprised, how do you think we felt?**

**While we lurched around in panic, Jesus was bedded down in the stern of the ship as though we were on a gentle cruise, sleeping like a baby.**

**Even when we woke him, there was no sign of fear, just that serene air of calm and the next moment the storm was stilled as if it had never happened.**

**For a time afterwards we were more scared than we’d been before, not of the water, but of him, for who or what had given him such power and authority?**

**We’d seen him forgive sins, heal the sick, restore the broken but here he was changing not only people but the world itself, even the wind and waves obeying him.**

**He was an amazing character, we knew that already, but we were beginning to realise he was much more, for, dare I say it, no ordinary man could do such things- only God.**

In that meditation Nick Fawcett is giving us a different perspective on the gospel story of the calming of the storm. The hymn that I have chosen next speaks of a different kind of crisis caused not by the wind and waves but by our own failure to live as Jesus would want us to and helps us to realise that even in those circumstances Jesus is able to rescue us and bring us peace.

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| Hymn | Love Lifted Me[Kim Hopper](https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&sxsrf=ALeKk01iWVjETUNPzPQG-dZ-k-9PhBIdtw:1623172637624&q=Kim+Hopper&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAONgVuLVT9c3NEwyjy8zNUmxWMTK5Z2Zq-CRX1CQWgQA_qerlR4AAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJxeWjxYjxAhWYQkEAHXmCBqEQMTAAegQIBBAD)I was sinking deep in sinFar from the peaceful shoreVery deeply stained withinSinking to rise no moreBut the Master of the seaHeard my despairing cryFrom the waters lifted meNow safe am ILove lifted meLove lifted meWhen nothing else could helpLove lifted meLove lifted meLove lifted meWhen nothing else could helpLove lifted meAll my heart to Him I giveEver to Him I'll clingIn His blessed presence liveAnd ever His praises sing*Refrain*Love so mighty and so trueIt merits my soul's best songsFaithful, loving service, tooTo Him belongs*Refrain* |

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**Sermon**

 Every sermon we hear these days seems to make reference to the Covid pandemic and this one is no exception. It has been the cause of so much stress, sickness, bereavement and so on and I’m sure you will have heard people say, or indeed you may have said it yourself.”Where is God in all this?” Whenever tragedy strikes , when a child is killed in an accident, or when there’s a flood and people’s houses are ruined or if a family member becomes very ill or dies, we either say “how can a loving God allow this to happen?” or we may say “I don’t know how I would have coped if I hadn’t known that God was with me to help me through” I wonder which type of person you are? During times of crisis is God a good God or a bad God? When you pray during the storm do you see God as caring or uncaring based on how He answers? The storms that we experience in life reveal whether we live by faith or by fear; whether our hearts are full of doubt or trust.*The way we react to God during a storm reveals the truth about ourselves, whether we want it to or not*. It is during the storms of life that we discover what we really believe. Maybe that’s why God allows them to happen.

Julie Schwab writes in “our Daily Bread” which I use as my daily devotional. On June 3rd she had written this. “I dropped to my knees and let my tears fall to the floor. “God why aren’t you taking care of me?” I cried. It was during the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. I’d been laid off for over a month, and something had gone wrong with my unemployment application. I hadn’t received any money yet. Deep down, I trusted that God would work out everything. I believed he truly loved me and would take care of me, but in that moment, I felt abandoned.

She then quoted a verse from the book of Lamentation which says “the Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.” And commented “Sometimes it feels impossible to believe these words especially when we can’t see an end to our suffering. But we can cry out to him, trusting that he hears us and that he’ll be faithful to see us through.”

In the reading we heard today we have an excellent example of a testing time and how the disciples reacted to it. If you would like to read another one during the week, take a look at the story of Job in the Old Testament.. Nobody could have blamed him for thinking that God was an uncaring God in view of all that he had had to endure? He had lived in misery for months with open sores all over his body and during this time he bore the grief of losing seven sons and three daughters in a terrible accident. He had lost all his wealth and had become an object of ridicule even from little children as he lay on the rubbish heap outside the town. Yet in spite of all these things, Job came to accept that the God who had made the world still loved and cared for him.

The reading we heard was the well- known story of the calming of the storm. As we heard in that meditation earlier Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee when a tremendous storm broke and the ship was in danger of being swamped. Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the boat but the disciples were terrified. One minute all was calm and the next minute the storm…not an unusual event on Lake Galilee so I understand.

But that’s also true of many of the storms that we endure and I’m not speaking of wind and rain; That phone call giving the bad news that someone we love has died; that routine visit to the doctor when we are told we have cancer or some other incurable disease; that day the stock market crashed causing us to lose all our wealth; or the day we are called into the bosses office to be told you are being made redundant. One minute life is good and the next it is hard to bear. Yes, just as it was that day on the Sea of Galilee, storms do happen suddenly and like the disciples, we too might wonder whether Jesus cares or not. They said to him “Don’t you care if we drown?” Storms will test and reveal *ou*r faith too because there is no doubt that the so called storms of life can cause you to doubt God, to ask whether he cares, to wonder where he is as we cry out to him.

You see the disciples’ concern about drowning was completely normal and reasonable. These were professional fishermen. They knew how to handle a boat during a storm, but this storm was fierce and violent and they believed they were going to die because of it. What the disciples didn’t know is that this storm would be the means by which Jesus would teach them something about himself and about themselves too.

 We can come to church and learn something about God or even about ourselves as we sit and listen to the bible or the sermon but it’s another matter to learn something about God and yourself when you lose a loved one, when you lose your job, when you can’t afford your bills anymore, when your health begins to leave you or when your marriage falls apart. Some lessons can only be learned in the middle of the storm.

What the disciples learned that day, as Nick Fawcett described so well, was that Jesus had the power to control even the forces of nature. To their absolute amazement when he awoke from sleep he commanded the wind and the waves to be still. Shocked they asked themselves “Who is this, even the wind and waves obey him.” Up to this point, the disciples knew Jesus was special and unique and that God was working through Him. However, this event started a significant shift in their thinking about who Jesus really was. Prophets of the past had performed various miracles like healing the sick, cleansing lepers, but this seemed completely different. This was the type of power reserved for God alone.. No wonder they were afraid.

But then Jesus challenged them “Why are you so afraid ? Do you still have no faith?” I guess he would have been disappointed in them because they still hadn’t grasped who he really was. Their concern about drowning was normal and reasonable so his rebuke and question about their fear and their lack of faith was not about their concern of drowning, it was their failure to trust him. They asked, “Teacher, don’t you care…?”  It was an accusation that he didn’t love them enough and this is the temptation for us when we become afraid. Because of the storm in our lives we see God as less than He is and we doubt His love and care for us, just as the disciples’ fear blinded them to who Jesus really was.

The lesson we must learn is to recognise Jesus’ love and care in the midst of our storms,.

As I was preparing this address the words of an old hymn that I must have learnt in Sunday School came back to me. The words were written nearly 150 years ago by Mary Anne Baker after her brother had died suddenly leaving her bereft. The words are based on our gospel story

**Master, the tempest is raging!**

**The billows are tossing high!**

**The sky is o’ershadowed with blackness,**

**No shelter or help is nigh;**

**Carest Thou not that we perish?**

**How canst Thou lie asleep,**

**When each moment so madly is threatening**

**A grave in the angry deep?**

**Refrain**

**The winds and the waves shall obey Thy will,**

**Peace, be still!**

**Whether the wrath of the storm tossed sea,**

**Or demons or men, or whatever it be**

**No waters can swallow the ship where lies**

**The Master of ocean, and earth, and skies;**

**They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,**

**Peace, be still! Peace, be still!**

**They all shall sweetly obey Thy will,**

**Peace, peace, be still!**

I know I have shared with some of you before now, the time when I realised that God was with me during one of the storms in my life. In 1995 I had been called for a routine mammogram and several days later I was recalled to the hospital. I remember having no fear. Everything would be fine. There would be a simple explanation. There was! I had a tumour. Breast Cancer. I said earlier that storms happen suddenly. Well that one certainly did. I was horrified. As far as I was concerned, in that moment I thought I was going to die. I felt sorry for Geoff because he had already lost one wife to cancer and we’d been married less than 4 years. These thoughts raced round and round in my head and that night we cried together and prayed and suddenly we knew Jesus was there with us telling us not to be afraid and I went to sleep calm believing all would be well. It was an amazing experience.

Of course we do not always come through storms unscathed. I came across a web site entitled Who cares. It has been set up during the pandemic and encourages people to share their stories of hope; experiences of knowing God’s presence. It says “ Here you will find stories of people who found hope when life hurt the most” One young man called Matt described meeting his future wife when he was 21. He’d never been out with anyone before and he described how they fell in love and she agreed to marry him. He said their wedding day was the happiest day of his life but seven months and two days later she was dead. She’d been diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. He told how comforting he had found the presence of Jesus, He said he felt peaceful in spite of feeling devastated and clung to the words of the letter to the Romans 8 35-37 “**35**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? **37**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[[k](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%208&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28155k)] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Those were the words of the apostle Paul who certainly went through some pretty dreadful storms, including ship wreck and imprisonment but, like Matt, his faith did not waver. He knew without any doubt that Jesus was with him. I sincerely hope and pray that in our darkest moments we too will feel him near. The words of our next hymn are very relevant to today’s message

**Will your anchor hold?**

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
fastened to the rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*
2. Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your bark o'er flow?

*(Refrain)*

3. Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past forever more?

*(Refrain)*

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**Prayers of Intercession**

Lord we pray today for all who are going through a dark time in their lives.

For those who have received bad news and those for whom the bottom has dropped out of their world; for those whose partner has walked out on them leaving no means of support; for those whose peaceful existence has been shaken by the threat of unemployment or financial ruin.

May they know they are not alone for God is with them.

We pray for those who are ill; for those affected by Covid, and still in hospital; for those who have just heard that a member of their family is terminally ill.

We pray for those who have been involved in serious accidents on the roads, in the air or on the sea; for those who are waiting for news of missing relatives.

We pray for those who have lost everything because of civil war or terrorist attack; for those without a home and family, for those who are making perilous journeys across the sea to try to reach safety.

May they know they are not alone for God is with them.

We pray for those whose harvests have failed, for those who are not just hungry but are starving to death; for parents who are unable to feed their children and must watch them die.

We pray for all who have lost loved ones and who feel that life is no longer worth living and for those who today will consider suicide to be the only way out of their darkness.

May they know they are not alone for God is with them.

Lord we pray for ourselves. Help us to know that we are not alone; that no matter how dark the present may seem, you have promised that you will never leave us or forsake us.

Lord in your mercy….hear our prayer. Amen

We end our service with

**Hymn 200 Great is thy faithfulness**

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be

*Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love

*Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness….*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside

*Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness….*

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**The Blessing**

Whatever today may hold, Whatever tomorrow might bring,

The future is secure for Christ is with us,

the same yesterday, today and for ever.

Live each moment with him

In quiet confidence and joyful celebration

For he is ours and we are his

For all eternity. Amen

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore Amen