

# **Sermon on Sunday 20 June 2021**

## **by Rev. Alan Stewart**

### **The wind and waves still know his name**

One of the great privileges of being a father is indoctrinating, I mean *initiating*, my children into the joys of the world's finest music. Few things give me more pleasure than my son or daughter discovering the genius of their father's musical taste.

In recent years, we've developed something of a family tradition where we sing along to our favourite music while doing the washing up. 'You'll always find me in the kitchen at parties' is the obvious favourite. Being an alphabetical playlist, however, the first song that comes on automatically is by Canadian singer Alanis Morissette, and recently the lyrics of this particular song have proved a bit of a talking point between myself and my son.

On first listen, the words are a little surprising:

'Thank you terror, thank you disillusionment, thank you frailty, thank you consequence, thank you silence.'

Silence, I get, but why would anyone be grateful for terror, for disillusionment, not to mention frailty or consequence, especially if it's harsh?

By way of background, in the early 90s, Alanis Morissette spent time in India recovering from the exhaustion of a hugely successful debut album full of her trademark angst and anger. There, she faced many of her demons and found some semblance

of peace within herself and with her past. The song 'Thank U' was written in appreciation.

Let's come back to that in a moment. For now, let's rewind a few millennia and transport ourselves from 20<sup>th</sup> Century India to 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel.

It's a story many of us know. Exhausted by the demands of the crowds, Jesus instructs the disciples (at least four of whom were experienced sailors) to escape by boat across Lake Galilee. Known for its sudden and unexpected squalls, a storm kicks off while Jesus is fast asleep in the hull. Terrified, the disciples wake him. 'Don't you care if we drown?' they shout, to which Jesus calmly responds by commanding the wind and waves to hush. And as quickly as the storm arose, it's gone.

This story is included in Mark's gospel first and foremost to prove something about Jesus's authority and identity. It's there to confirm that Jesus has lordship, control over the chaos of the natural world. It hints strongly at his divinity, bringing to mind the creation story in Genesis where God himself brings order out of disorder. Like many stories, however, this one works on many levels because there are many different kinds of storms in life, not least this storm we've all been weathering these past 18 months. There's much to reflect on within this story, but today I want to focus on those four words Jesus spoke to his disciples after the storm abates: 'Why,' he asks, 'were you afraid?'

It always feels a bit harsh that, don't you think? Like he's scolding them for what I think is entirely understandable terror. Also, isn't it just a little bit suspicious that Jesus sleeps through this tempest? Total speculation, of course, but what if Jesus was feigning sleep, waiting for that moment when the disciples hit desperation point? What if he was wanting to help them reflect on

the nature and source of their fear? What if that question, 'Why were you afraid?', wasn't a rhetorical reprimand, but a genuine attempt to get his friends to think through what their fear revealed about their deepest insecurity and their lack of trust?

That great expert on fear, novelist Stephen King says, 'If our fear cannot be articulated, it cannot be conquered'.

Naming or speaking out our fear denies it of the oxygen it needs. Kept inside, fear escalates and suffocates. To own fear, then, is the first step. The second is to ask ourselves, 'Where's it coming from?'. Often fear has its roots in insecurity born of experiences of rejection or betrayal. Often fear lies beneath our most difficult feelings, like anger or jealousy. Each time, therefore, before we vent these feelings, a good question to ask ourselves is, 'What is it I'm afraid of here?... Fear, show yourself'.

So, what fear do we live with? Fear that perhaps much of the time we manage until a certain button is pressed? And have you ever spoken that fear aloud to God or another human being?

When Alanis Morissette composed her ode to terror, disillusionment, frailty and consequence, she was, I think, grateful because each of these seemingly negative things taught her something positive and important. Combined, they took her to the place of breaking, of surrender, of accepting her frailty; of removing the layers of self-protection and self-sufficiency, and brought her to a place where she could let go of her need for control and for validation, and all the things we use to anaesthetize the pain and the fear. She came to a place where she chose to take responsibility and ownership of the consequences of her own bad decisions rather than blame them on something or someone else. She came to the place that

Richard Rohr speaks of where, 'There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am, and it's enough'.

Fear is natural, and often it's healthy; it's what protects us. Properly accepted, fear doesn't have to lead to fight or flight, but can be a catalyst for deeper faith and courage and self-understanding.

'Do you still have no faith?' was Jesus' second question.

Faith is trust; trust that whatever happens, our God is with us. You see, Jesus never promised to still the storms of life; to fix the things that beset us. He did promise, however, that whatever happens, 'I am with you, always'.

And those words are powerful enough to still the fear-storms within.

So, a moment now to sit with the silence and to allow it to surface any fear that needs to be named in this moment. If something comes to mind, you might feel it somewhere in your body; a tightening perhaps. If so, just imagine you're taking your next breath to where the tightness is and allowing it to soften what you find there.

Imagine yourself holding this particular fear in your hand, offering it to Christ, because the wind and waves still know his name. And hear his words:

'Hush. Be still. I am with you, always.'

Calm me, O Lord, as You stilled the storm.

Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

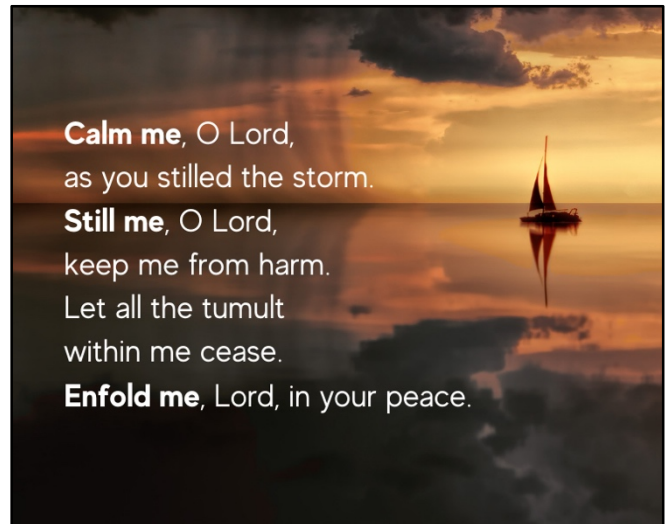
**Mark 4:35-41**

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

<sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

<sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

<sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"



# **Psalm 133**

## **New International Version**

Psalm 133

*A song of ascents. Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup> It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron's beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.

<sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.