

MARK SERMON SERIES - WEEK TWO

Readings: Mark 2: 23 – 3:6; Mark 4: 35-41

Last Sunday, we began a 7 week sermon series in our three parish churches – St.John's (*show picture*), St.Peter's Caversham (*show picture*, next to Caversham Court Gardens) and St.Margaret's Mapledurham (*show picture*, next to Mapledurham House) – a seven week sermon series on St.Mark's gospel. There are four people who wrote gospels, accounts of the good news of Jesus Christ, in the Bible. Who were they? (*show pictures*) St.Matthew, St.Mark, St.Luke and St.John, and we are focussing on St.Mark's gospel, the shortest of the gospels and the one which was written the earliest, probably in AD 65-70, so about 35 years after Jesus died (*point to cross above*) and rose again. For those of you who were here in church last Sunday, can you tell me what were the key events we looked at? (Beginning of the gospel, John the Baptist (*show picture*); Jesus' baptism (*show picture*) and temptation (*show picture*); Calling of the first disciples (Simon, Andrew, James and John – *show picture*), and Jesus' healing of a man with an evil spirit – *show picture*). This morning's readings have focused on two key events – Jesus' response to the Sabbath, that is the holy day kept by the Jewish people, which is a Saturday, and the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. I'd like to look at both of these briefly with you and then to think about them in relation to today's baptism or christening of Georgia.

In terms of Jesus' response to the Sabbath, Jesus surprised the Pharisees, some of the Jewish religious leaders of his day, with his response, and he did this in two ways. Firstly, by reminding them that the Sabbath was made for us human beings, and not the other way around. You see the trouble was that the Pharisees said that the Sabbath, based on the Jewish laws, was all about what you could not do. You could not reap the corn (for example), which is how they understood the actions of Jesus' disciples or friends, as they plucked the heads of grain as they went through the cornfields one Sabbath. But Jesus reminded them of the example of King David, who when he and his friends were hungry, went into the temple (the Jewish place of worship, *show picture*) and they ate the bread of the Presence, that is bread which was kept there to remind the people of God's special relationship with them. We keep some bread wafers, what we call the reserved sacrament, in a box with a light over it on your left hand side of the church. And so if someone turned up at church really hungry one day, it would be a bit like us saying, 'Here, have some of our bread wafers to eat.' This would have seemed a shocking thing to the Pharisees, indeed it might shock some of us who come to church regularly, but Jesus was wanting to remind the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for people's benefit, and not for their harm. The other way in which Jesus surprised the Pharisees was by healing a man with a withered hand who turned up in a synagogue (another Jewish place of worship – *see picture*) one Sabbath. The Jewish law did say that if someone's life was at risk, you could help someone who was in need on the Sabbath, but was this really the case with this man? Surely, Jesus could have healed him the day after? But Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the Sabbath is an opportunity for doing good, which is in contrast to their intentions which are actually to kill Jesus instead.

As far as the account of Jesus stilling the storm on the Lake or Sea of Galilee, this is another really interesting story (*show picture*). In Jewish culture, a storm at sea represented the forces of chaos and death, so the disciples would have been really afraid, as I'm sure that you and I would have been. Anyone here been caught in a storm at sea before? (*ask for egs*). Yet Jesus seems unaware of the events and is asleep in the boat. By Jesus stilling the storm (and the word he uses here in Greek for 'be silent' is the same word that we heard used last week when he told the man with an evil spirit to be silent), by Jesus stilling the storm he shows that he has power even over the wind and the waves. He is no ordinary man. And this produces an interesting response from the disciples, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

And that is an interesting and important question for us too. Who is this Jesus character for you, and for me? I think it was the writer CS Lewis (who wrote the *Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* – *show picture*) who said that Jesus was either 'mad, bad or God'. Christians have always claimed that Jesus was not only human, but also divine, he was the Son of God. In our baptism or christening service this morning, we will have the opportunity to state our faith in one God known in three ways, God the Father (who created the world), God the Son (Jesus, who lived, died and rose again), and God the Holy Spirit (the unseen yet active presence of God in the world, here with us right now). Georgia's parents, Ricky and Chole, and her godparents, Steffan, Karl and Mia, will also be asked if they turn to Jesus Christ, if they repent (or say sorry) for the things they have done wrong (their sins) and choose to live life by God's ways instead, and if they renounce evil, turn their backs on all that they know is opposed to God. As well as making those responses, they will also be pledging to support Georgia in discovering more about Jesus through bringing her to church, praying for her and caring for her. That is a great commitment to make for any child, and it is one that God promises to help them with, and we promise to do that in the service too. So as we think about their commitment this morning, it's also an opportunity for us to think again, 'Who is Jesus for me' (*show picture*) and how will I respond to the answer that I give? If he is really the Son of God, then will I turn to him, say sorry for the things I have done wrong and seek to live my life by His ways rather than my own, and turn my back on all that I know to be evil?. Do speak to me later if you would like to talk more about this. In my experience of following Jesus for over 30 years, it's a great adventure. He doesn't promise an easy ride, but He does promise to be with us always, through good times and through bad times as well.

Amen.