

Vicar's Letter – February 2019 'When trials come'

Dear friends

On 23rd July 2003, the adventurer Bear Grylls led a team of five across the North Atlantic Ocean in an inflatable rigid dinghy. They set out from Halifax in Nova Scotia, heading for John O' Groats. On 5th August, a great storm arose. There were 100 foot waves. They lost satellite contact and feared for their lives. Thankfully they survived to tell the tale.

Not many of us face physical storms such as this, but Jesus said we would all face storms of life (Matthew 7:25-27). Life is not easy. The storms are many and varied and can impact us in different ways: health, employment, relationships etc. The Bible is full of individuals who faced storms. Being a Christian does not give us immunity but it does give us assurance.

Take up the shield of faith

St Paul knew about 'storms of life'. He catalogues the 'storms' which he had endured; 'I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummelled with rocks once. I've been ship wrecked three times and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert, sun and sea storm and betrayed by those who I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labour, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather. And that's not the half of it.' (2 Corinthians 11: 24-27 Message).

He encourages us in the midst of it all to take up a shield with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (Ephesians 6:16). David declares, 'My *Shield* is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart' (Psalm 7:10). When the 'storm' comes make sure you have your shield in place.

Trust in Jesus the Saviour

Sometimes the storms in our lives appear without warning. On one occasion we read in the Gospel of St Matthew, Jesus was in a boat with his disciples. Suddenly a storm erupted on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was found to be sleeping, such was his exhaustion. Presumably the disciples were used to such events as flash storms were not unknown on the Sea of Galilee. However this must have been a particularly serious one because these hardened fishermen were in fear for their lives and cried out to Jesus, 'We are going to drown' (Matthew 8:25).

During the trials of life when the storms threaten, it is natural to panic. Sometimes it can appear that Jesus is 'sleeping'. He does not seem to be doing anything about our problems. Thankfully we can all cry out 'Lord, save us' (v25).

Whilst our natural response to trials and storms might be doubt and fear, Jesus tells his disciples that they should instead *trust* and not be afraid (v26). Jesus then demonstrated his authority over the elements by rebuking the winds and the waves and it became completely calm.

Trials of life will inevitably come to us and some of us are going through that right now. But with Jesus with us in our 'boat', when we turn to him he will bring a great calm to settle over us, even though the storm may continue to rage around us. We simply need to settle back, trust Him and take to heart the words of this song we often sing: 'My troubled Soul'

My troubled soul,
Why so weighed down?
You were not made to bear this heavy load
Cast all your burdens, upon the Lord
Jesus cares, He cares for you.

Jesus cares, He cares for you
And all your worrying won't help you make it through
Cast all your burdens, upon the Lord
And trust again, in the promise of His love.

Praise that mighty name of Jesus
Praise the Lord, the Lifter of my head
Praise the Rock of my Salvation
All my days are in His faithful hands.

My anxious heart
Why so upset?
When trials come, how you so easily forget
To cast your burdens, upon the Lord
Jesus cares, He cares for you.

Stephen