

Jesus Calms the Storm

Then in their trouble they cried to the Lord, and you delivered them from their distress.

You stilled the storm to a whisper and silenced the waves of the sea.

Then they were glad when it grew calm,

When you guided them to the harbour they desired.

-Psalm 107:28-30

Psalm 107 is a prayer and song of thanks. The song leader begins, "Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good!" and the assembled people reply, "For God's mercy endures forever!" Then the congregation thanks God for delivering the people from dangers in the desert, hunger and homelessness, anxiety and depression, the frustration of rebelliousness, and sickness of body and mind that threaten death. The section quoted above comes from the "dangers on the sea," and reminds us how quickly a pleasure cruise can become a long-remembered trauma when a storm comes up unexpected and tosses our little boat out of high waves and down into terrible depths. The verses are real: in trauma we do not pray as we have been taught, with composure and careful words; we don't even know we are praying as our anguish and fear take flight from our souls in tears, thoughts, sobs, cries for help, and even whimpers and shivering. God hears us when we pray with our body, too.

Yes, God hears our cries for help, even the silent ones. Psalm 107:28 is definite about how God responds: "You delivered them from their distress." Deliverance involves shades of helplessness, tones of desperation, struggles with demons, powers beyond our resilience. The Psalm is also clear how God acts: stilling the storm, silencing the waves, calming the mind and heart, and guiding to safe harbour. And the verses that follow clearly describe that safe harbour as the place of thanksgiving, of worship and praise, where hallelujah's are sung, the Lord is exalted by the assembly, and new life breaks forth. In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus completely fulfills Psalm 107, opening to us through his presence, his death on the cross and resurrection, and his on-going healing ministry through the Holy Spirit in the church, a path of healing from our traumas. By suffering the trauma of the cross, Jesus is with us in our distress; by rising in victory over death and the grave, Jesus is with us not only as companion in struggle, but as mighty healer. Jesus calms the storm, and also helps us through the post-traumatic effects.

The pandemic has been hard for us. Our relationships have suffered. Our mental health has deteriorated. Our church fellowship has become thin. Programmes have petered out, the momentum of a new pastorate died in wave after wave of closures, restrictions, uncertainties. Just as hope began to flicker again, vaccine reaction anxiety struck the media. And much worse: members fell ill with COVID-19, some have suffered serious vaccine reactions, family members and friends have died from the disease, and so many spiritual milestones have been delayed so long we wonder if there will ever be a time to celebrate. The weaknesses in our fellowship, in our faith, in how and what and who we worship, have been exposed to us by the storm. But Jesus calms the storm. Jesus stills the waves—smaller case numbers, rising vaccination rates, growing confidence to venture to worship together, maybe visit the lake.... New weddings are

being planned—baptisms that had to be delayed are being discussed—those memorial services we couldn't have are becoming possible.... As we pray together, for one another and with one another, as we talk together about how the pandemic affected us, as we together assess the damage to the ship and plan the repairs and renovations, Jesus is with us: Jesus is leading events, Jesus is sovereign over the forces of chaos and confusion, Jesus is the source of life and love, caring, sustaining, providing. Jesus calms the storm.