

## **'Identity and Being Safe'**

**Sermon at the Confirmation Service  
St Andrew's Chesterton, Cambridge  
Sunday 20 June 2021, 10am**

**by Bishop Graham Kings, Assistant Bishop, Diocese of Ely**

### **Introduction**

It is a great joy to be with you today, celebrating this service of Confirmation, Holy Communion and Admission to the Church of England.

Today's service and gospel relate to identity, who we are. A bishop once was visiting a residence home, wearing his purple cassock. He bent down to an elderly lady in an armchair and said to her, 'Do you know who I am?' She replied, 'No. But if you ask the warden I'm sure she'll tell you.'

Now, Mark and Katrina you're being confirmed today. Marie, you're being received into the Church of England and you've already been confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church.

Your identity is in Christ. You are in Christ and Christ's Holy Spirit is in you. So you're not receiving the Holy Spirit for the first time today. You're being renewed. You're being refreshed. You're being re-irrigated by God's Holy Spirit.

By your faith and baptism in Christ, you were joined to him and we're going to be remembering that too. After the sermon, we're going to walk down to the font. Everyone will turn around and you're going to renew your baptismal vows.

No doubt you have an email address. You also have one that, perhaps, you don't really know. It is your name, related to Christ and God.

Mark@Christ.God   Katrina@Christ.God   Marie@Christ.God

You know that your own email address is often seen as your identity. This is your deep Christian identity.

Who Christ is, is the central question of the gospel passage today, Mark 4: 35-41.

In verse 41, right at the end, the disciples ask, 'Who, then, is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?' So the gospel passage ends with a question.

There's another question, earlier on, in verse 38, 'Teacher, don't you care?' That's about being safe.

'Who is this?' is about identity. 'Don't you care?' is about being safe.

We've been buffeted by Covid and lockdown over many, many months and these two questions are also key for us. We're going to be looking at the first one, 'Teacher, don't you care' - being safe - and then at the second question of identity, 'Who, then, is this?'

### **Teacher Don't You Care?**

Context is very important. The context is in Mark chapters four and five. In chapter four verse one, it says that Jesus was teaching from a boat. He was teaching a large crowd on the shore and was telling parables - the parable of the sower and many other parables. Then, later on that day, he taught the disciples and explained the parables to them. He would have been tired and utterly exhausted after a day's teaching. Think what it's like if you've been on zoom all day for meetings or, pre-lockdown, if you'd had meetings non-stop. He would have been exhausted.

Verse 35 says, 'When evening had come he said, "let us go across to the other side [of Lake Galilee]."' That's to the gentiles. So, he'd spoken to the Jews - beginning with the Jews before going to the gentiles would be Saint Paul's policy - and now crosses over to the gentiles.

There, in chapter five, he finds the Gerasene demoniac, the madman called Legion. He rebukes the evil spirits within Legion and Legion is made safe. He is saved.

Back in chapter four, suddenly a great gale, a squall, comes up. The Sea of Galilee is known for these sudden squalls arising and suddenly going down. They were in danger of dying. They could have died. Jesus could have died at that point. They were scared. How do you think they really felt?

Well, the Psalm that we've just said together sums it up, in some ways. Psalm 107:25-27.

The Lord commanded and raised the stormy wind,  
which lifted up the waves of the sea.  
They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their calamity;  
they reeled and staggered like drunkards  
and were at their wits' end.

So, in some ways, this event is predicted and prophesied in the Psalm.

Jesus was asleep, in the stern, on a cushion. It's lovely that Mark records that little detail - there was a cushion. He was tired and exhausted. We think of Jesus being tired and thirsty in John 4 with the Samaritan woman. We need to notice where Jesus is tired throughout the gospels.

There's a famous cry in the Psalms, 'Wake up, O Lord'. Psalm 44: 23 'Wake up! Why do you sleep, O Lord?' Maybe you felt a bit like that during lockdown. 'Lord, what is going on? Are you asleep?' Here, yes he is, but the Lord does care. He woke up.

Imagine what that was like for Jesus. If you've been woken up from a deep sleep suddenly, you know what it's like - to be dragged out of it. Well, he would have woken up exhausted, maybe not knowing where he was, in the midst of this massive storm, with his head on a cushion, with his mates shouting at him, 'Don't you care?' They're having a go at Jesus. They really are.

Then he rebukes the wind and the waves - that's the same word, 'rebuke', which describes what he did to the spirits in the Gerasene demoniac in the next chapter. Jesus says to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'

Nick, you read that in the gospel quite quietly. I'm not sure Jesus said it that quietly. I think he might have shouted at the waves, 'Be still!'

Then the wind dropped and there was a dead calm. They were astounded. They were saved. He tells them off for their lack of faith.

Now, there are four moments in the gospels where Jesus is on water or by the water. The first is the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 4. Second, there's this stilling of the storm. Third, there's the walking on the water - can you remember that? - and finally, right at the end, in John 21 there's again the miraculous catch of fish, where he cooks breakfast for them on the shore.

I wrote this prayer about those four moments. It's called the [Boat Prayer](#).

Lord Jesus Christ,  
teacher on the shore,  
who calls and overwhelms us,  
friend in the boat,  
who sleeps and saves us,  
mystery on the water,  
who prays and surprises us,  
stranger on the other shore,  
who rises to welcome us,  
guide our boat across.

### **Who is this?**

The second question is, 'Who, then, is this?' This is where, again, our Psalm today is significant. Psalm 107: 28-29:

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he brought them out of their distress;  
he made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.

The Psalm is about the Lord God. The disciples, at this stage, only knew Jesus as Teacher. They're now beginning to see that he is much more than a teacher. In Mark chapter 8 they declare and confess that he is the Messiah, but it's only later, after the resurrection, in John 20, that they call him Lord and God.

In Psalm 46:10 the Lord says, 'Be still and know that I am God.' That is often seen as referring to contemplation on a retreat but, in the context of Psalm 46, it's about war and fighting. God actually is shouting - the Lord shouts - 'Be still! Just stop fighting, will you, and know that I am God.'

### **Conclusion**

So, Mark, Katrina and Marie, firstly 'Teacher, don't you care?' is a question about being saved from being overwhelmed and being in a situation of peril.

You have been saved, by Jesus, you are being saved and you will be saved.

You have been saved from sin, from being curved in on yourself, and from the judgment of God. You are saved for glory, for worship and for mission.

Yes, Jesus does care and has saved you.

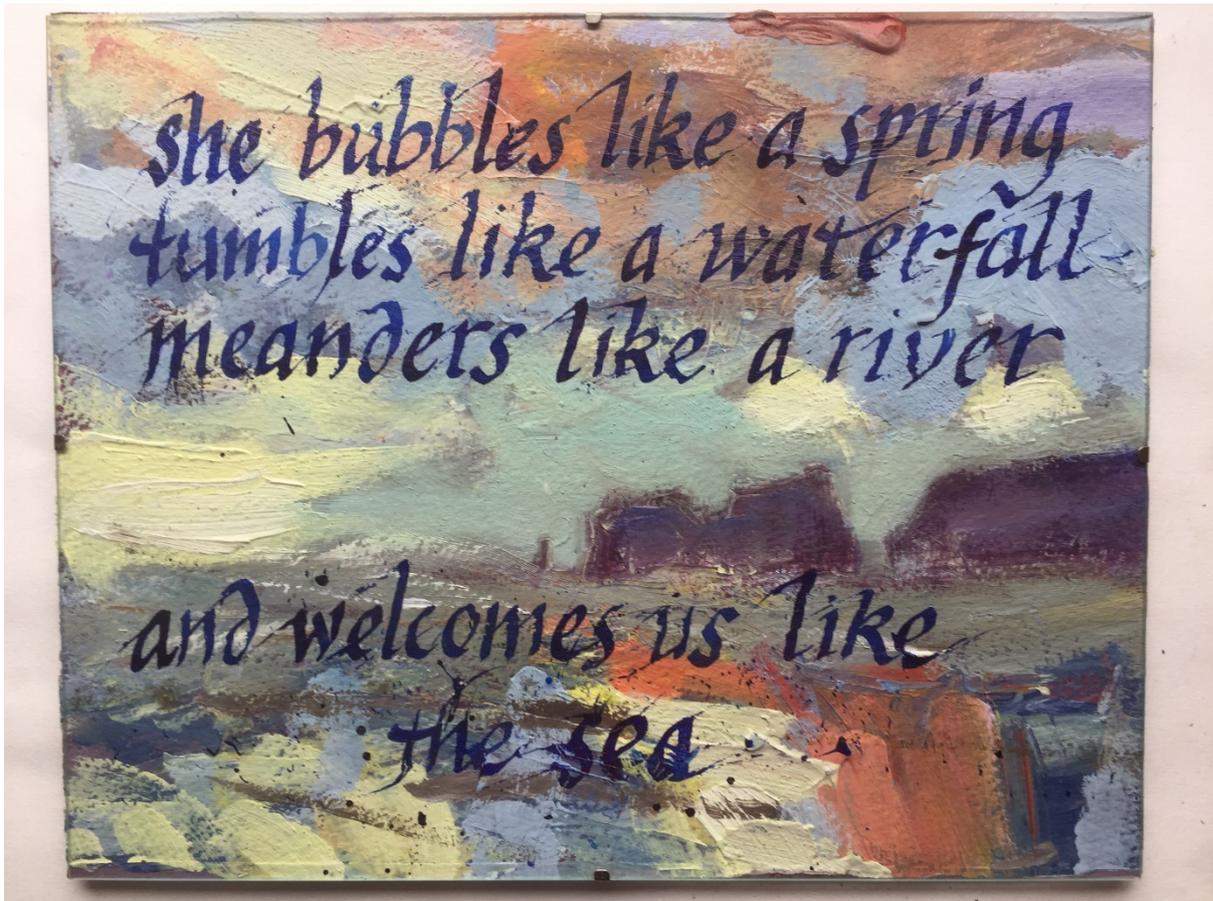
Secondly, 'Who is this, then, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Jesus is more than the Teacher in Mark 4. He's even more than the Messiah in Mark 8. He is the Lord God - 'my Lord and my God', which Thomas declares in John 20.

Jesus is the one who pours out his Spirit afresh on his people and that's what we're coming to in this service.

Now, think of the two symbols of wind and water in this passage. They're symbols of danger, fright and peril. They're really scary but they're also, ironically, two of the four symbols of the Holy Spirit. Wind and water are the symbols of the Spirit we're celebrating again in the renewal of baptismal vows, in a moment, at the font. The other two symbols are oil and fire.

I've written a [Pentecost Prose Poem](#). We often call the Holy Spirit, 'He'. Just for a change, in this particular poem, I call the Holy Spirit, 'She'. I led an Alpha course at St Aldhelm's Church, in Poole, Dorset, when I was Bishop of Sherborne. The vicar, Stephen Batty, was a painter and, as a 'thank you' for the course, he painted the first words of my prose-poem, with the background of the Dorset coast. I have the framed painting here:



The first verse continues like this:

You may as well try to bottle the wind as capture her. She is wild and unrestrained, surprising and unpredictable, yet true to her character and utterly reliable. She is reticent and reflective, giving glory to the Son and the Father.

I finish with the last verse another poem, '[Holy Spirit: Remembrancer](#)', in which I refer to all the four symbols of the Spirit.

O Holy Spirit,

Cascading water, coursing down the mountainside,

Whirling wind, sweeping up the valley,

Flaming fire, crackling in the hearth,

Soothing oil, seeping into cracks in an old cricket bat,

Fill us.