

Sunday between 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> June [12]

Mark 4:35-41

How would you describe God to someone who has never encountered the concept? Would you look back on wonderful images from artists over the centuries that offer a glimpse of a father figure in the clouds – Santa without the red suit? Or would you try to grasp the inexplicable with language we simply do not have? What would you say to the suggestion that God is supernatural? Some struggle with that word because of the connotations it has with UFOs and ghost hunters, but at its core it is a word that describes something that is above and beyond the natural experience.

Our gospel reading today is the miracle of Jesus stilling the storm which is a pretty superhuman feat by anyone's reckoning. The first miracle was the fact that Jesus was able to sleep in a boat during a storm that was so bad that the experienced fishermen were crying out in panic. You don't have to be an accomplished sea farer to appreciate that fishing boats and rough seas are a dangerous combination.

But as well as sleeping Jesus also managed to command the storm to cease. Imagine that for a moment, Sailors screaming in terror all around him, Jesus wakes to a scene of panic, a dark sky, high waves and the violent rocking motion of the boat, and his response is to tell the storm to calm down. It's a bit like the thing parents sometimes do to placate an upset child, say a child has hurt themselves by bumping into a table, how many parents have responded by saying, "naughty table" maybe even giving the table a smack? It's a daft thing to do really but its function is to reassure the child that we can look after them and we are in control of the things that hurt them, it also works as a very good distraction technique and often causes children to laugh at us making fools of ourselves. But it is much the same as what Jesus does in this miracle. He takes charge of the situation that is upsetting his friends and he rebukes it, only when Jesus does it, it actually works and the storm stops. Next he rounds on the disciples, "Where is your faith!" he exclaims, equally annoyed with them it seems for their lack of trust that he would indeed take care of them.

And then the disciples asked each other who is this man that even the winds and the waves obey him? Jesus has stunned his friends, these men who have been following him around for a while, who have heard what he has to say, who have already seen miracles performed, but this time they are stunned into asking a new question, not who gives this man the power to do these miracles, but who is this man? It's like Jesus has shown himself to be a completely different person in this action, more than a man, super human, super natural, and those closest to him are afraid and in awe.

The super natural is scary, by its definition it is beyond our understanding, it is outside our comfort zone. Some can ignore it and dismiss it as trickery and nonsense. Others will believe wholeheartedly in anything that cannot be otherwise explained and trust it until proven otherwise. But most of us find the supernatural unsettling and challenging, we don't know what to believe and what to dismiss, in our western way of rationalising everything and looking for an easy to understand explanation for every eventuality, we are uncomfortable with miracles and healings.

And yet we are here as Christians, in a moment we will recite the creed, our statement of belief, which speaks of super natural things, God, trinity, virgin birth, resurrection from the dead, all beyond our experience day to day and impossible to explain, maybe even hard to believe, yet we continue to struggle with this stuff and try to make sense of it.

What kind of man was Jesus? He was a supernatural man. It is impossible to know how that works on a biological level but as Christians we believe it to be true.

There has scarcely been a better summing up than the conclusion that C S Lewis came to during his personal journey of faith through atheism and ultimately to great theological conviction,

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

Yes, Jesus is supernatural, but not in a scary way, rather in an unexplained but comforting way, he can and does take care of us and our needs by grace and all we need is to have faith in him.