

Sermon preached by The Rev'd Glenn Maytum

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

I don't like boats.

When I was growing up at Gray's Point my father had a small fishing boat which he would take out onto the Hacking River to fish for bream and the occasional flathead. We could see him from the front verandah of our home.

Notwithstanding how delicious fresh fish were, there was always the risk that he'd be out too long: sometimes he fell asleep in the boat and the Southerly would blow up in the afternoon. You could hear it coming, across National Park and through the trees and my mother was always relieved when dad arrived back, as the wind would sweep into the river valley and make rowing back quite difficult, if not a bit dangerous!

Then, when I was teaching, there were the boatloads of Vietnamese Boat People escaping the regime change. We had a couple of Vietnamese boys enrol where I taught and their stories were horrific as they escaped storms, pirates and red tape to be here. "How many of your brothers drowned ...?" And, we still see this happening in the Mediterranean!

In fact, through the ages, boats and the sea, are often portrayed as dangerous: remember from your English studies "The Merchant of Venice" and "The Tempest", and just look at the picture on the front of today's pewsheet; then there were the Viking attacks and the Spanish Armada;

And, for us in Sydney, we won't readily forget the "Ruby Princess." You didn't have to actually be on that boat to feel apprehension and despair.

Scripture is loaded with stories of the sea and boats- from Creation (and "the face of the deep") to Noah, to Jonah trying to escape by boat, to St Paul being shipwrecked! We know that in Scripture the Sea has metaphorical meanings. There are different references to the Sea in the Psalms and Revelation. Which is all very interesting considering where we are seated.

You will remember from a previous homily of mine when I talked about church architecture, that this section of a church is called the "nave". It is the main body of the building, lengthwise, flanked by the aisles and extending from the entrance to the chancel. In many churches there are great beams (holding up the roof) and if you invert these beams they are like the skeleton of a ship. The word "nave" comes from the Latin meaning "boat".

So, at Church, we are all in the same boat! Amongst others, there is a boat in the top corner of the crest of the Diocese of Riverina. The boat and the Four Rivers. So it is for the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. And, Larche.

Why is the church represented this way? Because God is our Defender.

Throughout history the Sea has often been seen as a threat to life! The possibility of an evening storm and very strong wind on the lake where Jesus and the disciples were floating was to be expected, no matter how big or small the body of water was. And the waves grow and beat

against the boat and water splashes over the low sides. The people in today's story were quite reasonable to be afraid. Stories of losses and drownings would have been well known.

The author of our mid-year study in Mark, Marcus Borg, sees this story as a parable. A story that has application to our own life. It is a metaphor for the church. Many times, when something goes wrong, we panic and flee from God. Storms of many types can rage around us and cause us to be afraid: Covid 19/unemployment/empty toilet paper shelves/incurable sickness/ loss of a loved one and so on, are all capable of causing despair. Our unbelief in the power of God causes us to fear. Borg, in his book, says fear and lack of faith, go together.

But, we are supposed to be people of Easter, of hope. Borg also observes faith and courage go together. As our Psalm today says: "The Lord is a tower of strength in time of need; The Lord has been merciful to me and raised me up from the gates of death."

We are not without hope.

In the same way that Jesus gave a word to the wind in the story, a word from God is our beacon of hope in the most terrible and dangerous times. We build on the experiences God gives us to build our faith. Because, as Easter people, we know that the Lord will comfort and strengthen us at all times, by His Spirit and His Word. We should look to Him especially to do this when we find ourselves being tested by extraordinary circumstances. "God is the peace that calms our troubled seas".

And, "being in the same boat" together, in the church, we have the fellowship of our Christian friends to care for us. The relationships we share with others. So, while I said I don't like boats, I do like being part of the Church.

What's happening in your life? What storms are raging around you? I think today's Collect is a good place to conclude...

O God our Defender, storms rage around us and cause us to be afraid: rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us from all unbelief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.