

Prelude: *There is a Rose Blooming* by Brahms. Played by Alan Buchan

Words of welcome:

God says: be still and know that I am God,
I am exalted above the nations, I am exalted in the world.
Reminding ourselves that we are in the presence of God we use the hymn

Hymn: Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy one is here.

Prayer:

Still, Lord God, we would be still. We would pause and still our restless bodies and more restless minds to come before you, the Holy One, the Lord.

Calm me, O Lord, as You stilled the storm.

Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me, Lord, in Your peace.

We turn to you from the chaos of the world, the conflicting voices demanding our attention, the various matters that all want to claim that they are what matters most. We turn to you, because you are what matters most. You, God our Father, Jesus our brother, Spirit our helper.

We turn to you and turn from all that is not of you, asking forgiveness for the compromised way that we so often lead our lives, asking that in your peace and stillness you renew our faith and our focus.

And asking that you hear us as we pray as Jesus taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

Readings: Mark 4:35-5:20

Jesus and his friends were in seeming danger on the water. We are going to use the hymn “Eternal Father strong to save”, and as we do so remember not only those who might be in trouble on physical seas, but also those who know storms and dangers in life as well.

Hymn Eternal Father, strong to save

Peace, be still.

“Peace, be still!” said Jesus to the waves and the winds that drove them, and which threatened to overwhelm the boat. And there was calm.

“Peace, be still!” is in effect what he was saying to the poor possessed man as he commanded the demons within him to leave him alone.

In this story of the crossing of the lake and what happened when they got there, Jesus brings peace where there is chaos and trouble. He speaks peace to creation in the storm, and peace to creation in the possessed man’s poor mind. He shows not only what God’s power can do but what God’s purpose for his creation is: peace and harmony from weather systems to human lives and communities.

The storm and the poor deranged man simply had to let Jesus do what God does best, and accept the peace which only he can give.

And the disciples were filled with awe
And the crowds who saw the man healed and at peace were afraid.

In putting these stories one after the other – and remember that when Mark wrote he didn't divide into chapters and verses – Mark is showing us the similar but subtly different reactions to Jesus' power when the audience is those who are learning from him and living with him, and those who are just sometimes coming to see him. The disciples and the crowd.

Who is this? said the disciples. Maybe this was the first time that they realised that the man they were following was more than just remarkable. More than just a charismatic person. More than just a good teacher. You get used to people when you are around them all the time, and you can take them for granted. It happens all the time with families. It can happen with good friends. And it could easily happen with the disciples and Jesus. They had seen him heal before: but there were other itinerant healers, albeit not so successful. And they had perhaps got used to thinking that he could bring healing to human bodies and drive out demons. But to still nature, and change the weather? "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" The disciples were filled with awe.

The crowd begged Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. They weren't ready for real power to be shown. They weren't ready for the realities of life to be overturned. They weren't ready to have their minds and their lives changed. They were not prepared to put the health and happiness of one person before their accustomed life-style and means of living. They would be worried by the destruction of the pigs, of course, and since they kept pigs, we know that the herdsmen were not Jews, and might well see Jesus as some kind of nationalist, imposing Jewish standards on Gentile places.

He was in the country of the Gerasenes now, not on home soil. The country of the Gerasenes was not far from home: just the other side of the lake. It was land which had once been part of Israel, but now was not.

Maybe the church needs to remember that these days, even in this land, we are in the country of the Gerasenes as well. We live in a land which looks familiar, and which has been Christian, but although the religious landmarks are still around, and the view seems unchanged, the people we live amongst and to whom God sends us do not necessarily think as we do.

In the country of the Gerasenes it is not a given that if one person can be helped, then the community should put itself out. It is not a given that our own rights and preferences are not as important as caring for the rights and lives of others. There can be different opinions about what life is for and whose lives matter more in the Gerasene country.

And even in the Gerasene country there is a mission to be pursued, and the peace which God brings is not just for personal enjoyment, but for sharing. And so the individual who has known God's peace come to him through Jesus, the healed and restored man, may not leave the country of the Gerasenes and be safe with Jesus, but is given the job of telling of his experience to his friends and neighbours: the very people who would not listen to Jesus himself.

The reaction of the disciples is that of those who are already close to Jesus – there is more to discover! It is exciting but awesome as well. As we learn to be disciples of Jesus, there is never a point when we can say that we have fully understood and comprehended him, that

there is no more to know. There is more to know about him and more to discover as we walk through life with him: moments of awe will always be waiting to spring on us and surprise us and keep our faith fresh.

The reaction of the Gerasene crowds is the reaction that has kept the church domesticated for so long: we want to know what is what, and don't want anything that is new. We don't want our ideas upset. Sometimes when I look at the church – locally or nationally, and in fact especially the larger the body of church I look at the more I get the feeling that we have become Gerasenes: we don't want to have to live as though God was real and has come among us, because then we have to live with mystery and possibility and give up tradition and certainty.

And to the disciples and to the crowd, and to the healed and restored man – and to us, Jesus says, with reassurance and with challenge: “Peace be still”

Reading: Romans 11:33-36

If you were to memorise these verses from Romans, which include a direct quote from Isaiah 40, and then spend the week thinking about them it would be time well spent! Our resistance to the power of God, to the changes that following Jesus asks of us; our resistance to changing our world view from self-centred to God-centred and to living with our eyes open to see God at work would surely be worn down by our dwelling on that phrase: “For from him and to him and through him are all things.”

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

Often we would have a hymn at this point, but today we are having an anthem. Please listen and reflect as we hear reflective singing: Be still and know that I am God

Music: Be still and know that I am God.

Prayer:

To take in the fact that you are truly God, is to still other voices, worries and troubles. To know that you are God is to know ourselves in the presence of limitless love and infinite hope.

So hear us as we pray for those who need to know you and your presence and your peace.

We bring to you those who are close to us: friends or family members who we know are struggling in life, troubled, grieving, fearful, restless. In a moment of quiet we name them before you and lift them to your peace.

We bring to you those who are not known to us personally but who come to our attention in the news media: politicians who have responsible decisions to make; those who advise them; people who are working hard in a difficult time; people who fear that all their past work may now be lost. In a moment of quiet we lift them to your peace.

We bring to you those who live with such uncertainty as we can only guess at, and do not know how we would ever cope with. We pray for Christians who see their communities of faith disappearing through persecution and consequent emigration. We pray for people living

in refugee encampments. We pray for people who live in shadow of war and violence. In a moment of quiet we lift them to your peace.

We pray as ever for our friends in Libis and Kostalec, that you keep them safe in troubled times and in giving them your peace, they may shine your light for a darkened world to see. And this is our prayer for ourselves as well, and for the churches in the communities around us. We lift ourselves and our friends to you for your peace.

Hear all our prayers, which we bring you in the lovely name of Jesus, the prince of peace. Amen.

Hymn: He came down that we may have love.

Benediction:

May the peace of God which passes all understanding
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.

Postlude: "Communion" by Charles Tournemire played by John Crombie