

St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore

Who is this then?

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Mark 4:35-41

Hebrews 2:9-15

"Who then is this?" asked the disciples, "That even the wind and the sea obey him?" Who then is this? It is a question which we have heard asked by various people in various ways all through Lent. We began Lent by watching Jesus in the desert, wrestling with temptation, temptations which were to do with his own sense of identity. Was he to use earthly power to achieve his ends? Was he to test God before trusting him? Was he to use his power and sense of himself to meet his own needs? The answers he came up with were no, and no, and no. In deciding who he was and what he was and how he was to be, Jesus decided to do things in God's way, which he found made plain to him in the pages of Scripture. He was not just like everyone else, and would not act as though he were. There was and is a lesson for all who would follow Jesus in that. We too, although we are ordinary people are called not to be like everyone else nor think and act in the same way that everyone else does.

Then we saw the Scribes calling into question who Jesus was, and claiming that he was in league with the devil. They did not like the fact that he was not like anyone else, and they attempted to demonise it. Last week we saw Jesus the accessible teacher of parable and story. Who is this? we might have asked: the teacher, the rabbi, the man whose words and ideas stick and keep growing. And then today Mark shows us something else again. The Jesus of the parables is understandable: good teachers have always used metaphor and story. Jesus the teacher is a person we can feel at home with. But the man in the boat?

Who then is *this*?

Sometimes the people who are most capable of surprising us are the ones we think we know best. Sadly, whenever we hear of someone in the news who has committed a terrible act, the family or neighbours seem always to pop up and say that they can't really believe it of him or her. It is the last thing that they would have expected. It is because we think we know a person - a child, perhaps, though it is the foolish parent who thinks they really know what the child thinks and is capable of - or a spouse or a sibling - that we get surprised. Strangers are less surprising, because we don't know their normal patterns, we don't know what to expect of them.

So it is with the disciples. Their fearful surprise tells us that Jesus was not always going around doing this sort of thing. Usually he lived exactly the same sort of life that his friends did. He talked and laughed, ate and slept. But in this incident he shows a

different side of his character, one which the disciples have only seen glimpses of, one which perhaps it has been easier to ignore. And so they find that they are looking at their friend and leader with new eyes and asking "Who then is this?"

Who is this who gets so tired that he can sleep in a creaking, tossing fishing-boat? It is someone who is very human. Jesus' being asleep is not surprising to his friends, and should not be to us. We know what it is like to be tired, don't we? When I was away in Germany recently, I spent the five nights of my absence with very little sleep, so that by the time I got home, the world which spins unnoticed on its axis was also echoing the dizziness of my head. I could understand someone needing to sleep in a storm-tossed fishing boat: I could even envy Jesus getting his forty winks! Anyone who has ever been bone-weary knows how Jesus felt. The tired Jesus is one we can identify with. He is not superhuman. He is fully human, with all the limitations involved in living in a body. Our bodies need careful nourishing - proper feeding and resting and proper amounts of work and exercise. Jesus was human. We see him getting hungry in the desert, we see him thirsty by the well of Samaria, we see him absolutely exhausted, at the mercy of a body that needed immediate rest.

But then he gets up and commands the elements, and they obey.

Why did Mark include this incident in his gospel, and at this stage of the gospel? The earlier part of this chapter is a collection of parables, with no indication that they were all spoken on the one occasion. It is not the case that Mark tells us a parable and then tells us that the next thing that happened chronologically was this near-fatal boat trip. The section begins "On that day when evening came", but that is surely a narrative device. No good teacher would tell all these parables at once: none of them would stick. I don't think that Mark included the story here because it is in fact what happened next. He had a point to make.

I think that Mark tells this incident here because after the collection of parables, he needs to remind us who we are dealing with. This is not just a great teacher. This is, as he has stated at the very beginning of his gospel, "The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And the Son of God might have human needs, did have them, because he was a complete human being. But he also had God's power and authority, which we see him here using with the unruly elements. And if he could command the wind and the waves, how much more could he, should he command us, his people; and we, like the stuff of creation itself, should obey.

As we have seen, Mark has given us stories of how the authorities have been confused; of how the crowds have misunderstood to the extent of treating Jesus as tangible magic; of how his own family was perplexed by Jesus. We have read of him teaching and healing. Now the question is asked directly: who is this?

This story reminds us that *we* are not to be confused. Crowds, leaders, disciples and family might be confused, but we live with hindsight and we *know*. So knowing that Jesus is the Son of God, what does this story tell us? It reminds us who know that Jesus is God's Son, that he was also human. It is very hard for us to hold together in our minds

the idea of Jesus being as completely human as we are, and yet as completely divine as the remotest, most powerful, most wonderful manifestation of God we can imagine. It is hard to hold these things together, but by thinking on this incident we can see how it worked in practice.

This story is a wonderful example of the incarnation: of God, really God, becoming human, fully human. In it we see Jesus - fully human - exhausted; and fully God - commanding the elements. And we see that they are the same person.

Lately I have heard the Session Clerks of Laggan, Newtonmore and Kingussie talking about what they learned when last month they attended a Session Clerk's conference. One thing which each of them has made comment on was the closing communion service conducted by the Very Reverend David Lunan. David was speaking about spirituality and the spirituality of leadership, and he made the point that actually spirituality is not about becoming spiritual it is about becoming fully human, as Christ was.

It was when Jesus was most fully human that he was also most fully divine. And the same is true for us who are made in the image of God. We do not become more like Jesus by denying our human side, by pretending that we can ignore our bodily and emotional life. Christians get tired and hungry and thirsty. They feel sad and depressed and ill. They know times of great joy and wonder and of complete ordinariness. That is the glory, and it is a glory, of being human. And Christians also have God's Spirit living within them. When we are fully attuned to God's life in us we will not ignore the life of the body, the emotions of the mind, the stresses and joys of our life together: we will learn from them, meet God in them, grow through them. Jesus did this: he, as the enigmatic writer to the Hebrews said, "shared the same things" as God's children who share flesh and blood. (Hebrews 2:14)

As we pass through our Lenten journey, as we spend time with God, we too should be asking "Who then is this? And as we find the answer, which will, I hope, be a growing answer, we should also be asking "Who then, am I?"

Amen