

OK let me ask you a few questions what comes to your mind when you think of Nick Clegg? Or Lenny Henry? Or John Terry? Or Ian Bentley? It is interesting isn't it because we may never meet some of these men we may know very little about them but we will probably have a view on them. We might express an opinion on what sort of men they are.

I think the same is true of Jesus isn't it? When I mention his name I wonder what comes to your mind what sort of a guy was he?

This morning we have already had a passage read to us from the Bible, from Matthew's gospel. That's one of the four records we have of the life of this man Jesus. It was written to help us understand what sort of a man he was and one of the best ways is to read it or one of the other gospels. Matthew was trying to answer for his readers that very question and it is a question that comes in the middle of our reading. Because we have so many people here this morning and you may not be able to see a Bible let me put it up on the screen, Matt 8:27, "The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this?"

Here were these men whom Jesus had called to follow him and this was their question, "what kind of a man is Jesus?"

Now you may not have been asking that question as you came here this morning but these disciples were and with good reason. They were out on Lake Galilee and a storm had blown up which had threatened their little boat but Jesus had completely stopped the wind and waves just by speaking. No wonder they ask "who on earth is this man?" I think I would have as well.

I don't like most of the rides at theme parks, well you wouldn't expect a Vicar to would you? But as I read the gospels I do think it was a bit like a roller coaster for these disciples.

Some of them Jesus had met by Lake Galilee and he'd called them to follow him, which they'd done leaving so much behind –woosh! Then they'd seen him preaching and teaching – bit of a rise up the roller coaster there followed by loads of healings – more woosh! Then they literally climbed up the roller coaster as he took them up a mountain and taught what we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Now we are into more woosh as we saw last week loads of healings and here him calming the storm. But the question they were left with and perhaps we have the same question was "What kind of man is this?"

Well in the passage there are some clues.

1. the first is obvious in that **he was able to still the storm**, v26 "Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm." What kind of a man stands up in a rocking boat with people watching him and speaks words of command to the wind? Clearly someone who had complete confidence that he could tell the storm what to do. Of course some will say that it never happened because we have never seen it and because we can't do it. If you say that then I have to say you are not really asking the question who is this man. You have effectively made up your mind and I would ask on what grounds? Certainly not on the grounds of the gospel record!

What Matthew wants us to see here is the uniqueness of Jesus and indeed to see him as God so that as God who established the laws of creation he was able to set those laws aside.

2. The evil spirits recognised him. Having got to the other side of the lake they met these two men who were demon possessed. Now the Bible takes seriously the reality of an unseen spiritual world with both good and bad in it. As such evil spirits or demons are the agents of the devil aimed at destruction. These evil spirits recognised Jesus as the Son of God and that he had power over them. That is then shown as

3. Jesus overcame the evil spirits. Just as at his word the storm was stilled now at his word these evil spirits left the two men and instead went into a herd of pigs destroying them, which is indicative of the great scale of evil that Jesus was faced with here. His word was sufficient. However I know that the result causes all kinds of problems for people with questions of why he let the pigs die. But just imagine if Jesus had done nothing that the violence these men were inflicting on others as mentioned in v28 would have continued and presumably got worse damaging the men and others. The fact is here that the well being of the men was of upper most concern and Jesus showed he had power over evil and was able to release them.

4. Finally Jesus helps us to understand what kind of man he is by **what he said about himself**, v20, "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head". He showed that a few verses later when he was asleep in the boat! It is that expression "Son of Man" which gives us another clue as to who this man is. It is not a nickname. The snooker is on at the moment but we should not see this Jesus, the Son of Man, of Nazareth as something akin to Ronnie the rocket O' Sullivan. Jesus uses this name often in the gospels to explain in a subtle way who he is. The title come from the OT prophet Daniel who in one vision saw someone like "a Son of Man" coming in glory and authority on the clouds of heaven. It is that image that was at the back of what Jesus was saying. In other words in this simple title "Son of Man" he was claiming to be God's chosen King who would rule over all creation.

That is the kind of man he is.

I'm afraid I have not watched either of the televised debates between the leaders of the three main political parties but I understand that some people watching have machines that they can register how they react to what's being said from strong disagreement to strong agreement – so glad we don't have them here this morning. It means that people give an instant reaction to what's being said. Of course that reaction will vary and so they plot it out on a graph.

What we see in this passage is a variety of reactions to Jesus.

1. One reaction was **rejection** in v34 we read, "they pleaded with him to leave their region." Now why they did that we don't know. Perhaps they were afraid of more damage to the pig industry or just afraid of someone who commanded such power. But whatever it was one brief encounter with this man Jesus caused them to reject him. Is that how it is with you? Perhaps for someone here this morning sometime back you rejected Jesus so that when I mentioned his name earlier you switched off. If that is so and you are still listening then let me encourage you to think again. Life events such as having a baby as with Liz and Ian and John and Helen do make us rethink where we are at with God. But what ever let me encourage anyone who has put Jesus in the "not needed on journey" bag to as it were take him out and look again at this man.

2. Another reaction was **amazement**. That was the reaction of the disciples when Jesus stilled the storm. Their amazement shows that they didn't understand who Jesus was. As I said last week it is a bit like the gasp when you see the trick the illusionist does. You are amazed because you just can't see how it was done. Here as Jesus pointed out there was inadequate faith, "you of little faith". They had sufficient faith to turn to Jesus for help but their faith lacked understanding or the real expectation that Jesus could act. And note it is not the disciples disturbing him with their request that concerns Jesus but their fear and lack of trust in him. For some of us today our response to Jesus is a bit like the emergency cord – only pull in an extreme situation. Isn't that how it is for many of us we only turn to God, to Jesus when we have tried every other option. He is the

emergency cord though even then we have no idea whether he can do anything for us. I have two children, both grown up – at least that’s what they tell me. Over the years they have quickly found out what I can and can’t do. They knew that if they wanted a lift to a friend’s house or if they were short of some money then they could come to me. But help with German homework, with Maths homework with English homework well best not bother the old man!

The point is that as their relationship with me grew over the years they saw me not as the last resort but often the first but they also knew my limitations. Jesus wants us to so build our relationship with him that he is not the emergency cord but the friend who is there with us and for us no matter what.

3. A third reaction was **to follow Jesus**. We see that three times in the passage.

V19 when the teacher of the law said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

V22 when Jesus told a man, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Then in v23, “Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.”

This is what Jesus wants of us to follow him and indeed the strap line for this Church is “to follow Jesus in every way.”

But there are things in what Jesus said to the two men who wanted to follow him that we need to understand. To the first one who said he’d follow Jesus anywhere Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” A tad odd as a reply!

But Jesus didn’t want the man following him blindly.

I remember once driving into Worcester. I hadn’t done it before. At a set of traffic lights I followed the car in front as we turned right and then he turned immediately left and so did I even though actually I needed to go straight on.

Jesus wanted the man to realise that if he was after security and status and so on then Jesus was not offering that. Jesus didn’t even have a home to call his own. Yes Jesus wants us to follow him but with our eyes open to see the many good things that come but also the cost.

Then the second man came wanting to follow but first to bury his father and got that reply which seems to us very harsh “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” What Jesus was doing was saying look if you are going to follow me it has to be wholeheartedly – it is all or nothing.

Last week after the service someone took me aside to speak about the sermon. They noted it hadn’t had any references to Kettering Town in it – a serious mistake of course so let me put that right.

I’m not sure if I have mentioned before that I follow Kettering Town. I was at Salisbury yesterday for our last game of the season. It was a pointless game but that is what is following is about. There is a real threat that due to lack of money and the lease on our ground ending in about three years that we could go out of business. Then I think, “can I follow another team” and the answer is no. I have been following Kettering since I was six. Jesus wanted this man to follow him and he wants you and I to follow him but it has to be whole hearted. We can’t keep Jesus for Sunday or just for when we need him.

The call of Jesus to these men as it had been to the men who got in the boat with him was “follow me”. The same call comes to us. We may ask why should we follow Jesus? The answer from these verses is because this man is God. God who came as man and who revealed his power over creation, over evil and over us humans and calls us to allow him to have that rule over our lives.