Horrendous sea state with waves topping 8 metres plus and winds of more than 50 knots. These swell waves together with the high winds are making the sea bigger and more dangerous. Ships could easily become swamped by the crashing waves if care is not taken to properly prepare.

This sounds like its describing the scene from our reading today….“A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.”

But the first is a news report from the day that jeanette and I left Southampton for a cruise around the canaries….what feels like many years ago now.

This is a photo of us onboard but well and truly secured to the harbour side in the dock of Southampton…..what little we knew of what the following 24 hours would bring. We even booked ourselves into a nice onboard restaurant for a posh meal on the first night….it was half price….i have a feeling that the crew knew more than they were letting on.

Quite a few years before we set foot on that ship, there was an English clergyman names William whiting was, when sailing in the Mediterranean a storm broke out bringing with it hurricane winds and massive seas…waves like mountains as they crashed onto the deck….all felt doomed as even the lifeboats would be swallowed by such a furious storm……

He survived….and wrote the well known song ‘For those in peril on the sea’. Also known, maybe more aptly as ‘eternal father strong to save’. I will admit, there were moments when our ship was rolling and I could hear plates crashing in the distance, that I could hear that song playing on my mind…..I have never prayed so hard in my life!!!...Oh saviour, whose almighty word the winds and waves submissive heard, who walked upon the foaming deep, and calm amidst its rage did sleep.….oh hear us when we cry to thee….for those in peril on the sea.

I do believe that experience gave me some understanding of the fear felt by the disciples on that day as they crossed the sea of galilee….however I emphasis the word ‘some’ understanding. Our ship was massive…it had fancy electronic stabilisers (which didn’t do much)….Jesus and his disciples were in a small boat….not a mega ship…

This gives you some idea of the differences in size…..and this ship is much smaller than the one we were on……look at how it engulfs the small sailing boats.

The wind and the sea are mighty forces, and they have taken many lives, so many that the Bible says when the dead are raised the sea also shall give up the dead in it. The sea of Galilee is especially treacherous, for it is low and cliffs around it have valleys going into the sea. This draws cold air down which can produce a storm in a matter of minutes!

Jesus and his disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee. They are moving from the Jewish side to the Gentile side, the side where they are at home to the side where they are strangers, the side where life is familiar to the side were it is new, different, and unfamiliar. **We** may have never crossed the Sea of Galilee but we’ve definately been in that boat.

This is not just a story about the weather and a boat trip. It is a story about life. It’s a story about faith. It’s a story about fear. Wherever you find one of those you will find all three. They cannot be separated.

Sometimes the sea of life is rough. The wind is strong. The waves are high. The boat is taking on water and sinking. We all know what that is like. Each of us could tell a storm story. Some of our stories will begin with a phone call, a doctor’s visit, or news we did not want to hear. Some of them will start with the choices we have made, our mistakes, and our sins. Other stories will tell about the difficulty of relationships, hopes and plans that fell apart, or the struggle to grow up and find our way. Some storms seem to arise out of nowhere and take us by surprise. Other storms build and brew as we watch on

Storms happen.

But a reading today does see the disciples running and getting Jesus immediately….let him sleep….they tried to handle the crisis on their own. It wasn’t until things looked hopeless that they came to Jesus for help. That’s just how we are in our Christian lives, isn’t it?—We try to handle our problems in our own strength until we lose all hope, and THEN we cry out for Jesus.

Once I told a friend about a problem I was going through and I said, “I’m really going to have to pray about this,” to which he responded, “Prayer? You mean it’s come to THAT?!!!”

That friend jokingly identified a problem we all have—an independent spirit…a sense that we can handle our own problems…that if we need God bad enough, we’ll call on Him…and we feel—even if we don’t say it out loud—“God, I got this covered. If I need you, I’ll call. Don’t call me…I’ll call you.”

But it shouldn’t have to come to that before we look to God. God wants us to come to the place in our lives where we realize our dependence upon Him daily, moment-by-moment—before a storm even BEGINS; not just after we’re overwhelmed. God wants us to recognize our need of Him always.

When the disciples realised they needed Jesus, they called out to him...

“Do you not care that we are perishing?”

We’ve probably all echoed their words in the storms of our lives.

“Do something. Fix it. Make it better.”

In the midst of the storm Jesus seems absent, passive, uncaring. How can he sleep at a time like this? Sleeping Jesus is not what they or we want.

Sleeping Jesus, however, is in the same boat and the same storm as the disciples. He is surrounded by the same water as the disciples, blown by the same wind, beaten by the same waves. Hi response, however, is different. While disciples fret and worry he sleeps. The disciples want busyness and activity. Jesus sleeps in peace and stillness. His sleep reveals that the greater storm and the real threat is not the wind, waves, and water around us – the circumstances in which we find ourselves – **but within us**. The real storm, the more threatening storm is always the one that churns and rages **within us**. This internal storm offers much more to worry about. It’s this storm that threatens to drown us.

“Peace! Be still!” Jesus speaks to the wind and the sea. Jesus isn’t changing the weather as much as inviting the disciples to change. He’s speaking to the wind and the waves within them. The disciples have been pointing to what is going on outside them. Jesus now points to what is going on inside them. “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Jesus’ words are more about us than the circumstances of our lives, the storms we meet. Storms happen. Faith, more faith, better faith, stronger faith, the right kind of faith do not eliminate the storms of our lives. Faith does not change the storm. It changes us. Faith does not take us around the storm but through the storm. Faith allows us to see and know that Jesus is there with us. Faith is what allows us to be still, to be peaceful, in the midst of the storm.

The Spirit of God blows through and within us more mightily than the winds of any storm. The power of God is stronger than any wave that beats against us. The love of God is deeper than any water that threatens to drown us. In every storm Jesus is present and his response is always the same, “Peace! Be still! For I am with you!