



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

What Does it Mean to be Saved?

1 Kings 19.9-18; Psalm 85.8-13; Romans 10.5-15, Matthew 14.22-33

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The Archdeacon of Southend

What does it mean to be saved?

This is the second storm we encounter on Lake Galilee in Matthew's Gospel – the first is in Matthew 8, and contains the well-known words, 'save us Lord, for we are perishing.' Storms in the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, are often used to signify upheaval of other kinds – political, economic and social. So, in Jeremiah, as God's people face defeat and exile, it almost seems as if creation is undoing itself and returning to its primal chaos.

But storms have a second meaning in the Hebrew scriptures too; they prefigure the presence of God, as they do in our Old Testament reading today, as another prophet, Elijah, stands at the mouth of the cave. Prefigure – but do not contain.

What does it mean to be saved? What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord, and be saved?

Of course, at one level, our faith is deeply personal; after all, in our baptism, we turn to, we are named in the name of the one who, for our sake, became human, and became mortal, and suffered all that humanity suffers; in calling on the name of Jesus, we find our true humanity, and so are set free from all that puts us to shame, both for the now and for all eternity. And in the personal storms that are a feature of life for those who live in our world, in all its beauty and in its fallenness too, Jesus is the still small voice, the word that is nearer to us than our own heart.

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But this is not only personal. Long before the progressive political movements of the 20th century, the Gospel already clearly says: the personal is also political, social, and economic;

For to be saved is also to see that in Jesus, the new creation – in which all that is torn and divided is finally overcome – has already begun, through the Cross and Resurrection – even if it is not yet fully visible.

We are in the midst of storms that are not simply personal; the storms of our time are geopolitical, economic, social – and yes, in the climate emergency too, both literally and metaphorically. At times, creation appears to be undoing, we are in the midst of chaos and the centre cannot hold.

And so it is here in the Gospel; the verb 'battered,' used of the boat echoes political tyranny; it is used frequently in 2 and 4 Maccabees, in relation to the brutal rule of Antiochus Epiphanes. The world of Matthew's Gospel is a dangerous and turbulent world too.

Recall though: the storms in the Hebrew scriptures are *both* the undoing of creation in the face of human-made crisis, *and* anticipate the presence of God.

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Out of the storm, Jesus says to the disciples, and to us: 'take heart; it is I; do not be afraid.'

And Peter steps out. And we are called to take heart; to set aside fear and to step out too.

And to focus on him – for when Peter loses his focus, he notices the storm again, and starts to sink. We do too, of course – amidst the storms of the present age, how can we not? But Jesus catches him, and catches us.

When they got into the boat, the storm ceased. And those present recognise, in the still small voice, the presence of God in the Word made flesh.

Of course, it doesn't stay like that for Elijah when he hears the still small voice at the entrance to the cave; the still small voice is the voice that calls him to speak and to act; 'with word and deeds,' said the philosopher Hannah Arendt, 'we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth.'

Our second birth as Christians is the through the stormy waters of baptism, through the deep waters of death with Christ, so that we are saved and born to eternal life.

What does it mean to be saved? It is, at one level, to die with Christ and to rise with him in our baptism. And that is a transformation into our fullest humanity, for present time and for eternity.

At another level, it is to insert ourselves into the world in our words and deeds – as the still small voice that speaks in solidarity and in union with Christ and with others of the salvation that is the overcoming of all that demeans and denies the humanity of all people and destroys creation. Take heart; for truly, the one who walks towards us in the midst of the storm is the Son of God; in which God's Kingdom of justice, peace and flourishing is both a present reality and a future hope, and to which, in our baptism, we are called to bear witness.