

John 2: 1-11 & Luke 8: 22-25

In John's Gospel, Jesus described himself as “the light of the world” and our aim this term is to encourage us to draw close to that light not only to see and understand Christ more clearly but also by doing so help reveal our own true identity in Christ. Today I want us to explore the divine and human side of Jesus.

There are many narratives in the New Testament where the human side of Jesus is revealed; think of his thirst at the Samaritan well or his anger in the Temple when he perceives a gross injustice being allowed. But the two stories we have just heard are different because whilst they both speak loudly of his human nature they simultaneously speak of Jesus' incredible power over the natural world and consequently to his divinity.

Reference was made last week to Jesus' human side when Chris reminded us that the 12 year old Jesus returned to Nazareth with his mother and father, albeit at their second attempt, and ended by quoting the bible narrative when we are told that thereafter he was obedient to them. Conscious obedience is a very human trait.

The next occasion we hear of Jesus and his mother is at the wedding in Cana. And as the events of the wedding unfold we can see for ourselves two different sides to Jesus.

Without doubt he is human, because he appears to be as grumpy as I get when asked to do something that I don't want to: “Woman, what concern is that to you or me” he says to his mother. Human too in then doing what he is told with a degree of good grace. Or at least, I hope that my grace would be sufficient to overcome my grumpiness. Jane believes the jury is still out on that point.

But on the other hand by doing what he does to solve the problem passed on to him he definitely sets himself apart from humankind and John, the gospel writer, makes the point that the changing of the water into wine is but the first of seven signs which signify Christ's divinity. But what I find interesting is that wine in Scripture is a symbol of joy and warmth and celebration and abundance.

It is as if John is saying....have faith in Jesus and he will transform your mundane everyday life to one of abundant joy, although he might also add that we will only partially enjoy that warmth and celebration today because the joys of the new heaven and new earth are still to come.

But it is the second story, of Jesus calming the storm, that I want to focus on. Let me set the scene....Jesus has been traveling around the countryside near to the Sea of Galilee for days on end; teaching great crowds, healing the sick, driving out demons and at night spending long hours in prayer by himself. He is showing himself to be genuinely human with the same basic needs we all have; that he does not have unlimited strength or energy and needs time away from the crowds to rest and recuperate.

In fact it seems that Jesus is so exhausted that even the wind and waves battering the boat didn't wake him.

Back in 2013 when a number of us went to the Holy Land, we took a boat trip out on the lake. It was late afternoon and the water was like a millpond; it was incredibly calm and peaceful and I could easily imagine a tired and exhausted Jesus falling quickly asleep.

Our guide explained that sudden violent storms are well known in the area caused by the unique nature of its position and surrounds. The lake is only 200 feet deep and lies 680 feet below sea level but is bounded by hills which reach to 2000 feet above sea level. When strong cold air from the hills

is funneled by winds onto the semi-tropical warm moist air of the lake – bingo – a sudden violent storm results as the shallow depth of the water is whipped up rapidly because the wind's energy is more readily absorbed.

We got a feel for this when Jane and I did our second boat ride three years later. We set off in warm sunny calm conditions looking forward to an hours leisurely cruise. Before half way the wind started blowing and small white wavelets were racing across the surface.

Usually the boat stops and the crew act out the story of failing to catch fish and then catching many when told by Jesus to cast their net over the other side of the boat. This is followed by a short service with songs and hymns before heading home.

Not this time. The wavelets became waves; the waves became big waves; spray broke over the side soaking the unwary and the skipper headed as quickly as possible to the nearest point of landing. With hindsight, I'm sure it was not that bad, but it was certainly disconcerting for some and frightening for a few.

And yet that would have been absolutely nothing compared to the scene set out in our redaing. Although the text doesn't tell us which disciples were with Christ on the boat, at least four of them were seasoned fishermen. This would certainly not have been the first squall they had faced. Yet even these professional fishermen were frightened by this storm; to the point of fearing they would die.

And throughout all this, Jesus slept.

Does this hint at his divine side? Certainly his need for sleep shows his human side, but no matter how exhausted I can't envisage anyone continuing to sleep in such a violent storm where professional fishermen are fighting for their lives.

But of course, when woken, Christ's divinity is evident. Jesus does not get up and join the disciples in bailing out the water to save the boat. Instead they stand there watching as Jesus commands the wind and sea to calm, the inner peace of Jesus transfers onto his surroundings. By rebuking the wind and the sea, Jesus was showing that he had authority over the elements. Old Testament scriptures declared, only God could claim such authority. In which case, Jesus was openly demonstrating his divinity.

Yet strangely, this is not what the disciples recognize. Yes, they are awestruck but they do not yet understand, asking each other “Who is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”.

“Where is your faith?” asks Jesus of his disciples.

And that is a question which we might wish to continually ask ourselves in our daily lives. The calming of the storm is a story to comfort the frightened, the anxious and those of us who find ourselves in the storms of life. For those caught up in the despair of bereavement; for those trying to restore crumbling relationships or dealing with financial struggles.

And certainly the disciples believed they were in a life or death situation; they appealed to Jesus for immediate and urgent help.

But, that was certainly not the case in Cana. At worst, Mary might be embarrassed or the host humiliated but I do think it should encourage us to turn to Jesus in all situations of our life, not just

when we are desperate.

A living faith means placing Jesus at the centre of our lives and as these two stories illustrate clearly, faith in Christ is never misplaced.