

SUNDAY NOTES FOR 9TH AUGUST 2020 – PENTECOST 10

1 KINGS 19.9-18

At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.'

ROMANS 9.1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit — I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 14.22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Introduction

There is a peculiar spiritual “law” which dictates that humans are apt to turn to God when the going gets tough and then when the crisis has passed, God is quickly forgotten. Commentators speculate as to whether the pandemic has made people turn to matters spiritual in a way they would not have prior to the crisis. Whether, if it is indeed true, it remains so remains to be seen. The readings are excellent examples of this process symbolised by the story of the stilling of the storm and walking upon its waters.

Old Testament

During the reign of Ahab in Israel, the prophet Elijah took on himself the task of combating the worship of the false god Baal. This god-worship had been fostered by Queen Jezebel. Elijah, it must be admitted, adopted a very militant and downright bloodthirsty approach. All this occurred when he was on the run and ends up in a cave on Mount Horeb. Elijah felt burned-out and in despair as he encounters God. He is given rest and refreshment and is renewed for his mission. The cave encounter teaches him that his tactics are not God’s tactics as God’s approach is not to be violent. Elijah realises this from the symbolic use of the gentle breeze and not the mighty wind and earthquake. This parallels with the Gospel story as each are an encounter with God after the stilling of a storm.

Epistle

In this poignant passage St Paul tells of the sorrow and anguish he suffers because his fellow Jews refused to accept Christ as the Messiah. To emphasise the point, the original Greek employs the words for “ethnic relatives”. The pain Paul felt is not unlike what is experienced by those who become separated from family and friends over issues of religion.

Gospel

It is difficult to know with any certainty whether the story described occurred or was material assembled by Matthew to make a point. Matthew certainly wished to make a symbolic point employing his understanding of the history of the early Church. On that basis, then, the disciples represent the members of the infant Church; tossed about and persecuted by the onslaught of “wind” and “wave”. In the direst need of the Church, when all seems lost, the Lord come to save her. The incidence of Peter sinking into the waves and being rescued could be a reference to the betrayal in the garden and then his restoration to favour after the resurrection. Keep in mind that all these post-resurrection events would be familiar to Matthew. Keep also in mind that Peter represents all the disciples in their tendency to veer between faith and doubt. As was for them so for us. We often start out courageously only to lose heart when faced with a crisis.