

## WEEK 1: THURSDAY

Let's go on that boat and think what it was like. It's a small lake, as lakes go, but sudden storms come sweeping down from the hills. All of us in the boat know of people who've been drowned there, of whole boats that have been swamped and gone to the bottom, of sad homes back in Capernaum or Magdala where there are widows and small children dependent on relatives because the father and his sons didn't come home from a night's fishing.

So we are right to be afraid, aren't we? You can't deny that! And Jesus, who was doing such great things a minute ago on land, is . . . asleep. How can he do that? Doesn't he care? Should we wake him? Well, why not? If he can't help us, who can? Then it happens. He wakes up and looks at us, a bit cross but not, it seems, because we've woken him but because of something else. We haven't got enough faith, he says. Well, we've sailed this lake often enough and we know that it isn't faith that gets you across, it's hard work with the oars and sails! But then he is saying something again — this time, loud and clear, not to us but to the wind and the sea. He's telling them to shut up! Who does he think he is? This is crazy!

Only it isn't. The wind dies down. The sea becomes very, very still, like a screaming child suddenly pacified. And our question 'Who does he think he is?' turns into a different question: Who is he? What sort of man is this?

We've heard the old stories about God telling the wind and the sea to open up a way for his people to pass over. We've heard about Jonah, about Noah. We know the ancient, mysterious story about God making the world in the first place by replacing the waters of chaos with his new creation. We've always wanted this God to come back to rescue us. But we never thought it would be like this. And we never thought we'd have to wake him up to make it happen. But — wait a minute? Isn't that in the old scriptures, too? Didn't the Psalms some- times shout to God to wake up and sort out the mess?

When we get to the other side, it's someone else doing the shouting. A madman — actually, two of them; and they're yelling at Jesus. Something's got into them. We don't understand it but that's the only explanation. Maybe it's because we're off Jewish territory, this side of the lake. That's why there's a herd of pigs over there; you'd never get that in proper Jewish farms, of course. But now the men are begging Jesus — or rather, it seems to be the strange voices that are coming from the men — to send them into the herd of pigs. There must be evil spirits in there, doing the talking. And Jesus tells them to go. A sudden cold wind, and then it's all stamping and snorting and off they go — over the steep hill and down into the lake. Not surprisingly, the lads in charge of the pigs take to their heels as well. For two pins I'd go too; this is getting too scary for words.

But the heart of it is this. Not only the question we felt on the lake: Who is Jesus? But the question we now can't avoid: Is this what it looks like when God's kingdom begins to arrive on earth as in heaven? Does it mean that some sort of cosmic battle is now in progress, with the storm on the one hand and the evil spirits on the other trying as it were to attack Jesus, to stop him bringing heaven's rule to bear on this dangerous and distracted world of ours? What's that going to mean for us? What's it going to mean for him?

TODAY

Lord of wind and sea, help us to follow you, whatever the questions, wherever you lead.