

**21st June, 2015.**

**Reading: Mark 4: 35 - 41**

**Sermon Risking the Journey to the Other Side**

From the beginning of time, there have always been people who have looked for adventure and in some cases people who have dared to go where no man has gone before.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed from Europe to America not knowing where he would land. It was a voyage into the unknown. Space exploration has been another voyage into the unknown.

In 1987, a young woman called Lynne Cox swam the Bering Strait from Alaska to the Soviet Union enclosed in a heated chamber so that she wouldn't freeze to death. In 2003, she donned her swimsuit and goggles and swam 1.22 miles in the freezing waters of the Antarctic, spending 25 minutes in water cold enough to kill after only five minutes. She was up for adventure. Each to their own!

In 2008, Ed Stafford, began walking the length of the Amazon river, a journey which took him two years but he did it to highlight the plight of the Amazonian rainforest. There are also those who go and live with various remote tribes to learn about their lives and their cultures.

Then there is Robbie Stone, an adventure photographer, who has travelled the globe from Borneo to Papua New Guinea in an effort to find the most remote and bizarre cave so that he can capture the perfect shot with his camera.

Some seek adventure for their own ends, others for the benefit of others. The list of explorers and adventurers is endless but few, if any of us, will ever appear on that list.

I have to say, though, that those are fairly extreme examples but even on a lesser scale, the majority of us don't like taking risks. We don't like stepping into the unknown. We don't like doing anything overly adventurous which very often can result in us leading very dull, very uneventful, very humdrum lives. When we are asked what we have been doing today, how often do we reply, 'Nothing much'? Is that how we would like to be remembered at the end of the day, as someone who did 'nothing much'?

If the truth be told, maybe some people like it that way but a bit of excitement never did any of us any harm and, on the contrary, can inject new life into us. We don't need to go to the extremes to which the folk I mentioned earlier went. We don't need to scale Everest or jump out of planes wearing what looks like an airbed shaped like a bat. Our adventures and our exploration can be much more achievable, and hopefully, not life threatening.

Sadly, though there are people who refuse to change, who like to stick to the familiar, even if it is dull and unexciting. But sadly, that unwillingness to risk change or to set out on a new adventure can be reflected in our Church life and in our worship every bit as much as in our day to day living. In our Church life, it can lead to the same humdrum existence with regard to outreach and worship and even the day to day running of our Church.

We continue to do things as we have always done them because change is daunting and makes demands on us, on our time, on our talents and even sometimes, on our money.

At the session the other night, we looked at how we might move forward, now that the Congregational Board no longer exists. Would we do things differently or would we continue as, allegedly, we have always done with the same people and the same committees?

As a congregation, we have an opportunity to change and to move forward. Will we create a worship team, as someone suggested? Will we have a promotions team, as someone else suggested? Will we rethink the role of the elder with regard to districts and other areas of Church life?

Who knows but some of that sounds like a step in a new direction, one that can only be followed if there are people prepared to be part of new teams, people prepared to work as teams and to think out of the box, and not just the elders. However, there is no point in a lot of different teams if we just end up doing the same old things with the same old faces or even with new faces. We know that path without any directions being given and so to spend time reinventing the wheel is a waste of time, money and energy.

In general terms, Jesus, as our Lord, invites us to follow Him which suggests that we are not meant to stick with the same old, same old, but rather to move forward with Him to experience the new and the unknown. It's like

the children's hymn says: One more step along the world I go. It's from the old, I travel to the new. Keep me travelling along with you.

If we use the analogy of a holiday, are we going on an adventure to a new place to explore it and to see all the amazing things it has to offer or are we just going to sit at the pool and assume that's all our destination has to offer?

In our reading for today from Mark's Gospel, Mark tells us how Jesus said to His disciples: **Let us go over to the other side.** He was inviting them to go with Him on a journey, His journey, to the other side of the lake. It doesn't seem like a momentous move. The fishermen knew every inch of that lake but this trip was different. The other side of the lake was Gentile country which had not yet heard the gospel.

When we look at the passage which follows the one we read, when we look at the beginning of chapter five, we see that there were real challenges when they got there. We read there of demon possession, opposition and darkness. The other side of the lake doesn't look like the most inviting place to go and yet Jesus' plan was to take the light of the gospel to the people who lived in that darkness because He was their Lord as well. He cared for them every bit as much as He cared for the disciples and the Jewish population.

Jesus went and he cast out a legion of demons from a man, we are told. He cast them out and He lit a fire in that man's heart. He healed him and that man then took that message of healing further. He went back to his own

people and told them all that Jesus had done for him and they were amazed and so the gospel spread. But it took that initial step of getting into the boat and going to the other side of the lake for that to happen. Are we willing to get into the boat and see what is on the other side?

However, not every journey is plain sailing. A change of direction, even one which will have benefits, has the potential to blow up a storm. There is the potential for opposition. There is the potential for disaster.

In the midst of the storm, we may wish that we hadn't bothered going on the new journey. We may wonder where Jesus is taking us. We may wish we had just stayed where we were, and yet is that a genuine option for followers of Christ?

It almost sounds reminiscent of the parable of the talents where some went out and took a risk in investing their talents, while one stayed at home and buried his. What are we going to do with ours?

I was given a booklet by another minister recently which had been produced by his Church. It was one that was given to his members so that they could look at their talents and see where they could invest them in the life of their Church and community. They wanted volunteers to help in every area of Church life.

What talents do you have? Could you find a way of investing your talents in the life of our Church as we continue on our journey and as we follow in the footsteps of our Lord?

There is a challenge in that because it means taking a risk. It means facing potential opposition which many face when they suggest doing something differently. The waves at times can almost overwhelm us when the storm strikes but is that not where faith comes in? Is that not when we need to remember the words of Jesus, the words which caused the disciples to embark on the journey in the first place. He said to them: **Let us go over to the other side.** He was going with them.

The reassurance given in those words is expressed in Psalm 43, where we read these words:

**Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.**

Are we willing to step out into a potential storm for the sake of the gospel knowing what we do, namely that Jesus used His power to calm that storm.

He brought a calmness and order out of the chaos and fear on board the boat and even that helped the cause of the gospel. It left the disciples asking: Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey Him?

His power was able to reassure them but at the same time it unsettled them and that is what we want or at least, it's what I want. I want people to ask that question. Who is this man and my hope and prayer is that when we hear of all that Jesus has done for us, they will be amazed and will go and tell others as did the man who was healed.

Are you willing to get into that boat and go with Jesus to the other side?