

Sunday 8th August 2021
Luke 8:22-25
Rev.Scott Burton
Brightons Parish Church

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word:

Holy Spirit come among us and soften our hearts to the word of God Holy Spirit come among us and help us to follow after Jesus Holy Spirit come among us with power and deep conviction for we ask it in Jesus name amen in the new testament we have four books on the life of Jesus Matthew mark Luke and John and they wrote it for a purpose I wonder what you would say their purpose was why did these authors write these books so if you feel able and you're close enough to someone maybe turn to a neighbor and share with them just for 30 seconds the first thought comes to mind why did they write these books and if you're at home and then do post something in the live chat so 30 seconds why did these authors write these books over to you

so

well I'm sure there are probably a many answers to that and we'll see later on uh what comes up in the live chat about what people at home maybe thought if they feel able to share that but if I was to ask our wider community the parish I wonder what they might see I wonder if they would describe these books as simply a means of passing on religious morals and stories I wonder if they would describe it as a kind of propaganda even I wonder even if I asked them do you think there's any relevance in these books what they might say I suspect that many people would say no I suspect many people might say well there might be if you're religious but there might even be some who say well this book is dangerous it's oppressive even because over my summer break um I read this book it's called a war of loves and it's written by a celibate gay Christian and it partly describes his journey from hostile atheist to a passionate follower of Jesus and at one time he would have said the bible was dangerous and oppressive and he wanted nothing at all to do with Christianity but then he came face to face with Jesus and that changed everything friends we might summarize that the reasons for these books in the new testament as to invite encourage and enable people of all ages to follow Jesus and that is our purpose also as a church that the authors they wanted people to know about Jesus and by hearing about Jesus choose to follow Jesus and by choosing to follow Jesus recognizing then that needs some help to know how to follow Jesus and so they include material for that too they were willing to do this they were willing to prioritize this and to put their lives on the line because something changed their perspective just like that young author I read about the last two weeks they all met Jesus and by meeting him and learning to follow him their outlook on life changed forever our passage today is one of those moments one of those moments when the disciples themselves have their perspective on Jesus challenged and stretched if you look back in in the book of Luke chapter 5 that's when Jesus called his disciples and since that point he's mostly taught he's done a couple of miracles and so probably in many people's minds they're beginning to think oh who is this guy who is this guy maybe he's a prophet you know like prophets they challenge people and so Jesus is certainly causing a bit of a ruckus and challenging the religious leaders but prophets did miracles as well so maybe Jesus is just another prophet sure a great prophet but just another prophet but then one day Jesus tells his disciples they're going to the other side of the lake and among these disciples are some experienced fishermen so the journey's not unfamiliar and they know

how to handle a boat and so off they go not giving it a second thought and at some stage in the sale things are so calm that Jesus he falls asleep in in the book and the disciples continue on with the task of getting them to the other side maybe they're they're talking maybe they're thinking about all they've seen and heard and about this individual who now rests in their midst and then at some stage a squall a windstorm comes upon them and that wasn't unusual in that particular area because the surrounding topography created those kind of events but it's a particularly bad one these experienced fishermen are scared for their lives and so they cry out to Jesus master master we're going to drown

upon waking and assessing the situation Jesus calls out to the wind and to the waves he speaks to them and the storm suddenly dies down and all becomes calm the disciples are left feeling both fear and amazement and they say to one another who is this he commands even the winds and the water and they obey him is he just a teacher is he a prophet is he maybe something more because they would have known from the old testament that God is described this way you rule over the surging sea when its waves mount up you steal them who is this who is this amongst the disciples what appears to be God God in human form because he has authority and power and if you look on in that same chapter the next three stories reinforce this Jesus has power and authority over nature over the spiritual forces of darkness over illness and even over death and in time the disciples would journey with Jesus and see him die upon the cross be buried but then raised to life again and though this would convince them that he is the son of God in human form and they would be willing to share this at risk to their life even imprisonment and death because they were fully persuaded that Jesus is God he is God in human form with all power and authority and the apostle Paul would one day write about this to the church in Colossae saying the son is the image of the invisible God in him all things were created he's before all things and in him all things hold together he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him friends who is Jesus to you who is Jesus to you and might I ask what or who has supremacy in your life the disciples in our story were asked by Jesus where is your faith where is your faith basically in whom or in what is your faith we've all placed it somewhere our new members today they affirm that their faith is in Jesus that he alone is God he has supremacy in their life they take off the crown and give it to Jesus he's their lord he's their king he's the one to whom they give control of their lives because he has all power and authority he's more than a mere prophet or teacher so who is Jesus to you and what has supremacy in your life in our local community there were many answers to both of those questions some people might say that it's work or success or popularity that has supremacy that's the aim of life that's what you have to aim for some people will prioritize family should have supremacy in your life for some individuals it will be circumstances or a particular experience which will define their identity a loss a an illness a really negative experience that's what defines their life that's what defines their values that defines their future and still others that I've met within our community they will turn and say supremacy is found in darker spiritual forces like tarot card reading or maybe a group that they belong to that group is the place that gives them identity and that group has the supremacy that group tells them what they can and can't do so what

are who is Jesus to you and what or who has supremacy in your life because the claim of the Christian faith is that Jesus is God he alone is God and as such he should have first place in our lives and to have anything else above Jesus is to commit the sin of idolatry and you know we can turn even good things into idols because as John Calvin reminds us the human heart is a perpetual idol factory we just turn out idol after idol even the good things and we put other things before Jesus so friends who is Jesus to you and will you allow him to have supremacy in your life now don't think this is just for folks who are new to church or folks who don't come to church because this was an important lesson for the disciples to learn to they needed to learn this to do what Jesus asked them to do next because if you go on in the book of Luke we read this when Jesus had called the twelve together he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal those who were ill Jesus who is God in the flesh who has all authority and power he delegates some of that power and authority to his disciples now we might say well that was just a 12. well go on to the next chapter what do we see the lord appointed 72 others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go the 72 returned with joy and said lord even the demons submit to us in your name so he gives power and authority to the 12 and to the 72 and can you imagine being one of those disciples can you imagine it one of the fun things to do with scripture is to imagine yourself there can you imagine it Jesus comes along and says hey could you go and heal someone hey could you go and cast out that demon what would be your reaction would you be all cool calm and collected I think inside I'd be slightly freaking out I'd be like really me and when you left and you came across that first unwell or demon-possessed person how ready and willing would you be to do what Jesus has done to give it a show like imagine that standing in front of that person and knowing that Jesus has sent you to do what he's been doing imagine that would you feel up for it if you do it right now

suspect many of us wouldn't

and to for those disciples to be willing to follow through on that call from Jesus they needed to know that Jesus was more than a mere man and they needed to be committed to him more than to their own comfort because they were going to have to get out their comfort zone and to more than what seemed possible because to the rational mind this is just crazy now why am I bringing this up well often I think our perception of what it means to follow Jesus is quite limited we limit it to verses or ideas that we are comfortable with and we push aside a greater vision of Jesus and a greater vision of what it means to follow Jesus one author put it this way it's a wee bit jargony but it's worth reading it is a tragedy that the Christian religion is in many minds identified merely with pious ethical behavior turning up to church saying prayers and vague theistic beliefs you know some weird ideas about God suffused with aesthetic emotionalism so it makes you feel better and a male glow of humanitarian benevolence so you end up doing some good stuff for your neighbor this is not the faith which first awakened the world like a thousand trumpets and made people feel it blessed to be alive in such a dawn at one time people knew what Christianity really was the entrance is the history of a force of immeasurable range

what does it mean to follow Jesus to you is it about morals is it about knowing some good stories and turning up to church is it about being a good neighbor is it about making you feel better what does it mean to follow Jesus because those things aren't necessarily bad they're just not the whole picture because Jesus later on by the same author says you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth the church apparently has power if you follow Jesus you have a power within you to be his witness now why is that important why am I laboring this well if we reduce Christianity to morals and old stories and religious duty and a warm fuzzy blanket then we rob Jesus of glory and we rob ourselves and our children of what we need to follow Jesus because today we heard one of our promises that many of us have made one of our membership promises and it says this do you promise depending on the grace of God to profess publicly your loyalty to Jesus christ to serve him in your daily work and to walk in his ways all the days of your life and in our last teaching series if you remember on grace we learned that grace is intrinsically tied to God's power and here in this context of this promise is the power to equip us in the power to sustain us and without a greater vision of Jesus and without a greater vision of what it means to follow Jesus we will not publicly profess our loyalty to Jesus we will shy away from that oh I'm not a Christian I don't go to church and we will never invite anyone else to know Jesus because we will shy away from it because we will not rely on God's power and our children and our children's children will not walk in his ways all the days of their lives if again we and they don't learn to rely on the one whose power can steal the storms and his power now resides in you and me we need to recover a Christianity that is more than turning up to church being nice because if that's all that is I'm walking out the door and not coming back because I cannot be bothered with that and you know too many of us are not like this with our faith we are timid and many of our young people are timid because we're not passing on to them a faith that makes them anything otherwise we're timid in our faith and it's got nothing to do with being an introvert or an extrovert so please don't give me that excuse it has more to do with our conviction of who Jesus is and who we are as his disciples do we really under believe he's God with all power and authority do we really believe that we are called and empowered to be witnesses and make known the kingdom of God

will we keep our faith in Jesus and hold on to his promises and allow him to have supremacy in our lives even over our comfort or what seems possible or will we become fearful the disciples became fearful in this story because they did not hold on to the promises God made God in Jesus he said they were going to the other side it wasn't a wish this was going to happen this was a promise but when surrounded by that storm they forgot what he said and they were gripped by fear rather than by faith are we a church who are gripped by fear or by faith are we laying hold of God's word even the uncomfortable bits or do we minimize Jesus and what it means to follow him to what is familiar and comfortable and by doing that are we robbing Jesus of glory and are we robbing ourselves and our children of what we need to follow Jesus you know over the years i've learned different ways to help me have a broader vision of Jesus and nurture ways that help me understand more of Jesus and what it means to follow him and there are there are various things but you'll not be surprised by now that I'm going to

recommend you some books are my thing I like reading stories and usually once a year I try and read a book that is more about someone else's story and so the recent book was a war of loves but I could recommend you book after book here or something chasing the dragon red moon rising God smuggling a war of loves as I've mentioned surprised by the power of the spirit or the hiding place these are real people's stories across the decades across situations demographics countries but they all tell a real life story of how someone met with Jesus and by meeting with Jesus their vision of Jesus was enlarged and they were helped to hold on to the promises that are there in scripture friends maybe your one take away from today is to go get one of these books and have a read and then come back to me with your questions because I'm sure there'll be some there's more to Jesus there is more to following Jesus than what any of us know and if our perspective of Jesus is to grow if our self-understanding of what it means to follow Jesus is to mature if we are to have boldness to live for Jesus and our readiness to let him have the supremacy in our lives then we need to get to know Jesus better and we need to get to know his promises and his word better and hold on in faith to him and to those promises. I pray it may be so, Amen.