

Sermon Archive

Sunday 9 November, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Preacher: Rev. Dr Tim Pratt,

National Director, CWS



StormBusters

Readings Mark: 4:35 – 41 and Revelation 22:1-5

Kia ora. I'm from the small team at Christian World Service. Our job is to represent church in responding to global aid and development. CWS has been doing this stuff for a long time. In fact, this year we celebrate 80 years, and it seems we are the oldest aid and development organisation in Aotearoa/New Zealand

I'd like to take this morning's readings of Jesus calming the storm along with that vision in Revelation and weave them together into a picture of what we as church could be like. It's a story of compassion and justice, and of doing to others as Christ has done for us. I thought I'd do that by telling a few stories around theme of water, which is such a rich theological theme.

This painting of Jesus calming the storm is by the Dutch artist Rembrandt who was renowned for his use of light and dark to capture drama, emotion and mood. Around a third of his pictures are religious, and so often they tell a spiritual story.

Of course, the Dutch are a serious sea faring nation. The country is well known for storms crashing along its coastlines. Added to that is Rembrandts' personal life which was full of trauma and drama. So, it's not surprising this picture nails exactly how disciples must have felt

A few years ago, our daughter and son-in-law decided to buy a small yacht. Our family have sailed pretty much since Catherine and I were married. But Alysha was never really into the sailing part of it. While we battled wind and waves, she was to be found somewhere inside, typically reading a book. So, the sudden interest in a boat was a bit of a surprise. As neither she nor our son in law knew how sail, they asked me to skipper for the maiden, delivery voyage

The trip from the Bay of Islands to Auckland is around 240kms. It takes around 25 hours if the weather is cooperative. As we were about to leave, the forecast was good, and the two-hour sail from Doves Bay to Cape Brett was great. I was thinking they'd bought a great little boat. However, as we were making our way down the coast, the wind betrayed the forecast. It was building and as dusk settled, the gusts

were up to 33 knots. In sailing terms that's storm-warning stuff, especially for a small boat.

My crew were no longer enjoying the trip. Tevita my son-in-law was no longer looking Tongan, rather he resembled something of an alien, and had gone quite green.

As it was getting dark, the wind turned angle which meant the waves were building and pushing us towards the coast. I'm trying see where we're going but the problem is as the waves crash on bow, they're sending water hurtling in the air. The wind picks this up, gives it some force and a sheet of cold salty water lands repeatedly in my face.

I decided we'd have to take shelter in Whangaruru harbour, about half an hour away. Usually I'd go between the island & the mainland, but it was way too dangerous that night and so we'd have to go around it, and that would take another half hour. It's tough going, this is by far the worst storm I've sailed through in around 40 years.

My heart is pulsing; I can feel the adrenalin in my veins.

Finally, the moment arrives, we've cleared the island. Just the turn to go. The Problem is that the boat is overpowered, and I wonder if when I pull the tiller, whether the boat will come about. I remember thinking this is seriously unlikely. You know that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. Your mind takes a direction of its own. It panics, you see everything going wrong and becoming a calamity.

Well, a quick prayer, because it's amazing how spiritual we become when we're desperate.

I wait for a lull in the wave pattern ... and in the wind. Then I pull that wretched tiller as hard as I could. The boat edges up to wind, everything goes in slow motion. The boat flattens as we lose pressure of the wind on sails, but we're pitching up and down, then - ever so slowly, we begin to turn.

We motored another three quarters of an hour to get far up harbour, before dropping anchor.

I get the story of Jesus calming the storm. It's a beautiful story to remind us God is with us. When times are tough, God is there in our midst to comfort, support, and guide us through.

The chances are some of us going thru thick of it in our life today and could well do with being reminded that when the going is tough, that's the time to lean into God. Sometimes we need reread Ps:23. If this what you need today, then take that Psalm as your own.

There are times in life when we need faith for us. There are also times when we need to give our faith away to others, to follow our values, to follow the way of Jesus. This giving and taking of our faith is an iterative process. Sometimes we need know, to experience the comfort of God for us, when we're in midst of the storm. But there are also times when we've got capacity to give our faith away, to give it to others as they go through life's storms.

I love that picture from Rev:22. It captures this idea of giving faith, of giving God away. It's a picture of church, of us as Christians that's as inspirational as it is prophetic. We, the church, like water enriching humanity. Flowing out of our worship, down into the streets, watering people lives. We the church being "healing to the nations". How might we become that visionby caring for others, by living the values of our faith, by loving one another.

It's how we care for our families, our friends, for the communities we live in. It also about how we care for the world.

Recently, I visited Isingiro. It's around an eight-hour drive Southwest from the main airport in Uganda - somewhere near the border of Tanzania and Rwanda. Isingiro is a pretty place, it's very rural, When I was there it was dry and dusty. It also poor and in parts extremely poor.

The hills are serious four-wheel drive territory. Within them are a ton little village settlement. While in the township there is piped water, not so in the hills. To get water they must walk, sometimes three, four or five kms.

None of this water is good, but there are different grades. The closest water comes from dug out dams. It's seriously bad stuff, forget the colour, cattle go there to drink, and I could see the dung both around and in the water. Further afield is spring water. It's slightly better quality but the minerals and the salt make it hard. Sadly, it's still full of germs, bacteria and parasites. Even further afield is the river. Theres water there all year, but it's a long, long walk.

Isingiro is the stuff of the World Health Organisation statistics where they say 1.4 million people die each year from a lack of safe drinking water. They die due to cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, and polio. The journey to get water means mothers are not able to care for babies, it also means kids are not getting to school. To make matters worse, it's not physically safe to walk.

When I was there, one of the village leaders read a wee speech he prepared.

"Most of our people get income from casual labour where one is paid USD1.00 a day. Due to our topography, water shortage is a problem which leaves our health prone to many challenges and diseases. We only get water from down the hills which is about 4km from here. Safe water can

only be got from River Kagera which borders Tanzania. As a result, our wives are raped on the way, our children are defiled, others are kidnapped or killed. Water is the major problem of this community.”

Back in 2008, one of our CWS family, John Gould attended an academic conference on water in Nairobi. While there, he met Charles from Isingiro. Charles had a vision of building water tanks to catch water from house roofs. As a result of that meeting, to date our CWS family has helped build of 1500 water tanks in Isingiro.

When I visited with Charles, he wanted to show me over and over again the need of people in the hills. Just to make sure I got it, that I really understood they were poor ... tragically poor and that they desperately needed water. But the truth is that within a minute of standing by that man-made dam, looking into eyes of the kids there collecting water, the need was so incredibly obvious.

Currently were financing 50 water tanks to be built here each year. Our goal is to multiply that to 100, and maybe 200. For me, this is the stuff of Rev:22 - water flowing from throne of God, giving life to people, giving life to those suffering amid a wretched storm.

Last year we raised just over \$300,00 from our annual Christmas Appeal, I'm hoping and praying for over \$400,000 this year.

Sometimes we need Jesus to calm the storm in our own lives ... and sometimes we've got capacity to give our faith away, to help others, and to calm the storm in their lives. If you've got capacity just now, to show the same care and compassion that Jesus is famous for, you may wish to be that river of life, watering trees and people living through their own storm in Isingiro, Uganda.

If so, we invite you take home the little brochure you've been given this morning, fill it out (or better, do so online) and support the hill people of Isingiro to have safe drinking water.

My time has gone; may God bless you. Matewa.

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.