

Living with risk

'I have a lot of time for Jesus' I remember my Granny saying 'but he didn't know what it is like to grow old'. You can't argue with that, she was right.

We could all say something similar today, 'I have a lot of time for Jesus but he didn't know what it is like to live in a world with Covid 19.'

In recent years a slogan has emerged that is designed to help Christians deal with the challenges of everyday life. This slogan has the initials 'WWJD', which stand for the question 'What Would Jesus Do?' There is merit in asking ourselves this question when wrestling with a challenge or a moral dilemma. The problem is that, as with so much about faith, it is hard to be objective. We know what Jesus would do if he lost a coin, or met a leper, or found himself at a wedding when the wine ran out, because we have the bible to tell us. We do not know for sure what Jesus would do if an ageing relative has become impossible to live with because of dementia and might need residential care, or, which box he would tick in a Brexit referendum, or if he would send his children to school during a pandemic. We can read our bibles and say our prayers as we ponder the question 'What Would Jesus Do?' but there is a real danger that we end up deciding that Jesus would do what we were going to do anyway.

We talk a lot about Jesus living with vulnerability. He was born in the poverty of a borrowed stable, totally dependent on others to care for him and he was killed and buried in a borrowed grave, the victim of powerful oppressors. He knew about vulnerability, but, did he know about risk? That is a really interesting question. Was the course of Jesus' life pre-ordained by some great plan or did he live with making choices, like we do, that could genuinely lead his life in different directions? Many, many books have been written about such questions, but we can't read all those as we struggle with the challenges of today.

Whenever I wrestle with these kinds of questions I usually end up on the Sea of Galilee. This was the scene of one the most significant events in Jesus' life. He was with his disciples in a boat. He had fallen asleep and while he slept a huge storm blew up. His friends, many of them experienced fishermen, became so frightened, fearful for their lives, that they woke Jesus up in panic. In one version of the story the first thing Jesus does is to stand in the boat, in the middle of the storm, and say 'Peace be still' and the storm calmed.

In another version of the story the first thing he does is to be cross with the disciples for being so agitated and concerned, why were they frightened while they had him with them? Then he calmed the storm.

The point is that, for the disciples, this was a very risky situation, clearly they were frightened. The response from Jesus was to take away the cause of the fear (he calmed the storm) and to challenge why, as people of faith, they were frightened at all.

We will never know for sure if Jesus miraculously calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, but he certainly seems to have calmed the storm of fear that was overwhelming the disciples simply by being with them. Jesus' life, death and resurrection show us that whatever is beyond our control cannot overwhelm or defeat us. We step out in faith with Jesus by our side, not as some kind of holy 'rabbit's foot' to keep us safe, but as a living guide and companion who holds us always, through calm and storm, through health and sickness, through life and death – constantly revealing ways to move forward and to draw closer to him and to living life in all its fullness.

Today there is a lot of talk about safety. Lots of people are working to keep us safe during this pandemic and all of us are seeking to keep ourselves, our families and friends safe. Risk Assessments are everywhere. All of this is natural and good. But there comes a point when we all have to accept our vulnerability and accept that taking risks is part of life, it always has been and it always will be. We can control some things, but we cannot control everything.

It may be that a vaccine will be found for Covid 19, or it may be that we have to learn to live with it. The point is that whatever happens with this virus in the future there will still be risks to negotiate, weigh up and live with. There will be still be random accidents, sickness and the actions of evil people which will remain beyond our control and will remain a risk. When this particular storm abates, there will always be the threat of others. What we have to remember is that Jesus remains with us, in storm and in calm, and that,

'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Romans 8.38,39



Life is a glorious gift, but storms happen. There is danger and risk to live with every day. Perhaps what we need to do is to remind ourselves, each new day, that whatever we face, be it calm or storm, Jesus is our companion and with him at our side and with him as our guide, filling us with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love we can take hold of life, in calm and in storm, and live it to the full.

Peace, be still