

Feeling Afraid

In this unit you will explore

- 1 How people can feel vulnerable in situations beyond their control
- 2 How people who believe in God can sometimes feel vulnerable when faced with God's power

This unit raises some important questions about humans' attitudes to God and to coping with real fear. We shall learn about an incident in the past but we shall also ask, what can be learnt from it in the present?

Consider these questions before investigating what the narrative on the next page has to say on the subject. Make a note of your own response and any different views others may have expressed, so that you can refer to these later. At the end of the unit you will have another opportunity to reflect on the differing responses to these questions.

Questions

- 1 Are humans in control of the natural world? When might they feel threatened by natural forces?
- 2 Are there other times when humans may be afraid and not feel in control of their lives?
- 3 If God is real, why does God allow things like earthquakes and volcanoes to cause death, suffering and destruction?
- 4 If God exists, what does God do about the 'storms' in people's lives today?
- 5 Can belief in God sometimes make people feel more afraid?

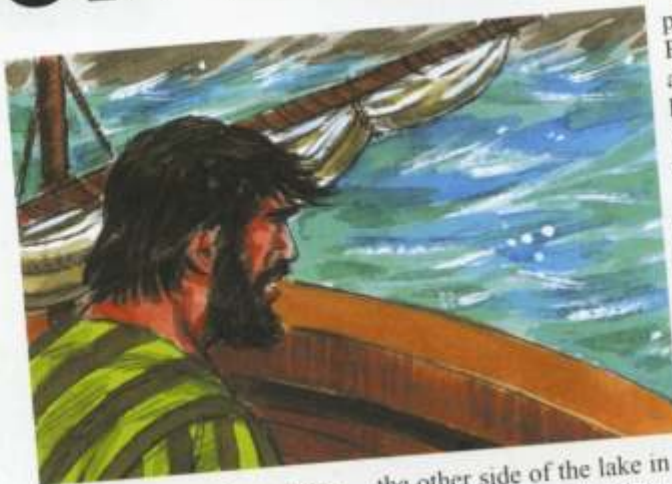
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

**DAZED PETER
SPEAKS
TO THIS
NEWSPAPER**



The **GALILEE GAZETTE**

Dramatic incident on Lake of Galilee



It had been a long, long day with crowds of people – and you know how tiring crowds can be. I was completely exhausted, and Jesus certainly looked as if he could do with a rest. He looked quite worn out with talking and listening.

Anyway, we decided to get away from the crowds and started to cross over to

the other side of the lake in the boat. There were other boats already on the water. Well, we must have been somewhere around the middle when, suddenly, a great storm blew up – like we get sometimes up here in the north – and great waves began to crash over the boat. It began to fill up with water. I looked over at Jesus, who was sleeping soundly, with his head on a

pillow. I couldn't believe it. Fast asleep in the middle of all this! I tried to wake him: 'Teacher,' I said, 'aren't you bothered that we're all going to drown?'

I don't really get what happened next, but I remember Jesus standing up and saying 'Be quiet! Be still!'. And suddenly there was a great calm. We must have looked really scared – we were scared enough before he said that – because he turned to us and asked why we were frightened. I wondered why he had to ask! Then he said something really puzzling: 'Have you still no faith?' Just like that. 'Have you still no faith?' I mean, of course I believe in God, but the point is, we were about to drown.

I didn't know what to say or where to turn. The others looked just as petrified –

Professional fisherman in total panic as waves threaten boat!

that's a funny one for me, petrified. It means 'turned to Peter'. Or rock, or stone – that's what my name means. Turned to stone with fear. All I could do was wonder: who exactly is this man? Even the wind and waves obey him!

Freely adapted by Terence Copley from Mark 4:35–41 (Good News Bible)

Use these clues to help you understand the Bible narrative and see what the writer may be getting at. They will help you to answer the 'Reflection, Response' questions.

Could this really have happened?

- Some scholars say that there were sometimes sudden storms over the lake, which could end equally suddenly.
- Some suggest that Jesus was telling the disciples, rather than the storm, to 'be still' and to trust in God.

God's power over nature

- In ancient times, having power over the forces of nature was regarded as a sign of power from God. The sea (in this case a large lake) was a symbol of chaos and disorder. Genesis chapter 1 describes God having to tame the sea as part of the process of creation. The Hebrew Bible/Christian Old Testament is full of examples of God demonstrating power over the unruly forces of nature.

Reflection, Response

Discuss

1. Why do you think Peter tried to wake Jesus?
2. Is it strange that Jesus was apparently asleep while a great storm was raging around him? Give reasons. Why might the writer have felt this detail was important?
3. What might Jesus have meant when he said to his disciples, 'Have you still no faith?'
4. Even after the storm had died down, the disciples were frightened. What or who do you think they were afraid of then? If this incident happened exactly as described, would the disciples be more afraid at the end, or less afraid? Why?
5. If God has power over creation, then why do things that cause so much suffering, like earthquakes and volcanoes, exist? How do you think Christians might try to make sense of suffering in the world? (Clue: Christians believe that Jesus' power over the wind and waves on this occasion was an example of God's power.)
6. Is there a difference between believing in God (perhaps as an idea) and having faith in God? What might the difference be? Go back to the narrative for clues.

Find Out

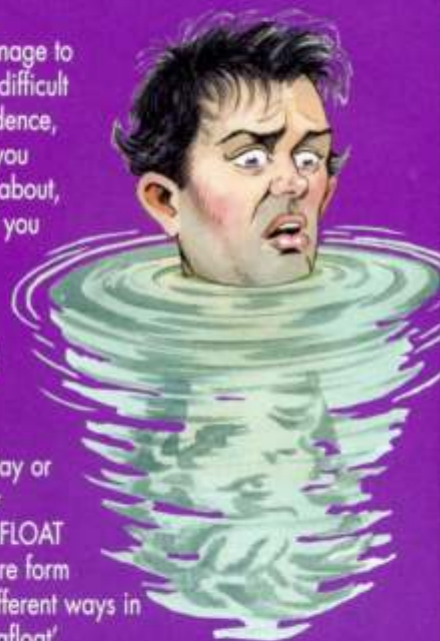
Mark's gospel was probably written round about the time of the Emperor Nero's attack on Christians in Rome (65–66 C.E.). What was life like for the early Christians during that time? What 'storms' or difficulties were they facing? (Do a web search or read encyclopaedia entries for: Mark's gospel; Nero; early Christian persecutions.)

Record

1. Draw, paint or use collage techniques to create a picture that somehow captures the moment when Jesus commanded the wind and the waves (or the disciples) to be still. Remember the words of the disciples in Mark's account: 'Who exactly is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!'
2. Why do you think this account of the calming of the storm in Mark's gospel might have been particularly important to the early Christian community? (Clue: Nero's persecutions.)
3. In what ways can life be said to have 'storms'? Give two examples. What difference might belief and trust in God make to someone who was going through one of these 'storms'? Are some storms more tempestuous than others? Why?/Why not?

Imagine

1. Muslims believe that Allah is ultimately in control of the universe and has a plan for all events there. How might such a belief affect a Muslim person's attitude towards suffering? Would it make them feel more vulnerable or less vulnerable? Explain why.
2. How do people manage to stay 'afloat' during difficult times? Examine evidence, either from people you can personally talk about, including yourself if you wish, or from newspaper accounts of how people have coped with physical and emotional 'storms'. Either mount a display or make a small poster headed STAYING AFLOAT and present in picture form with captions the different ways in which people stay 'afloat'.



Questions

Look again at these questions from the beginning of the unit. Have you changed your initial response? Why? Why not?

1. Are humans in control of the natural world? When might they feel threatened by natural forces?
2. Are there other times when humans may be afraid and not feel in control of their lives?
3. If God is real, why does God allow things like earthquakes and volcanoes to cause death, suffering and destruction?
4. If God exists, what does God do about the 'storms' in people's lives today?
5. Can belief in God sometimes make people feel more afraid?

Concepts

Here are some concepts you have encountered in this unit:

- the nature of biblical material – miracles and/or unexplained events
- the human and divine nature of Jesus
- the existence of suffering in the world
- belief in God's omnipotence.