

Imagine if you will one of those new modern hotels, so certain in its own trendiness that it deliberately eschews all dress codes and indeed frowns witheringly at anyone who should cross the threshold in a tie, let alone as I once did for a baptism party, in a clerical collar. I felt like a pariah. All is swagger and confidence and as far as I can tell one of the obligatory features is one of those pools described pretentiously (and wholly inaccurately) as 'infinity' in which the surrounding paving is at the same level as the water. This is alarming to a non-swimmer (but then how uncool is that?) and suggests that the average punter would think nothing of strolling across the water to order a drink at the bar.

The events of recent years in the Mediterranean and the South Asian seas, as migrants desperate for a better life expose their lives to the threat of capsize and drowning have significant political and economic dimensions. But the chill it offers to all of us is the renewed realisation of the untamed power of the sea. We get the tingle of it as the air stewardess reminds us of the presence of a life vest under the seat – and mentions coyly, 'in the unlikely event of a landing on water'; a landing? We got it when the ferry went down outside Zeebrugge years ago, within sight of the passengers' hotels. And a friend of mine is so gripped that he can be hardly prevailed upon, when visiting, not to plunge into the dvd of 'Titanic'.

The sea is one of the few things which continues to check human ambition – altho' plainly it does not prevent us from denuding fish stocks and polluting the seabed. Our view of creation is hopelessly human-centred. But consider this; if the history of the universe at 13.7 billion years were to be divided up into 30 volumes, each of 450 pages, each page representing one million years; then, if the Big Bang is on page one, volume one, the story of earth doesn't begin until Volume 21 and living organisms don't appear until near the end of volume 29. Our ancestors don't show up until several pages before the end of the final volume and human life as we know it with its complexity of culture, ethnicity, faith and philosophy not until the very last lines of the very last page of the last book in the series.

I find that sobering and requiring recognition that in creating the universe, God may have been about something quite different from just the creation of our species, described rather immodestly in one of our prayers as 'the crown of creation'. But the argument may run, that if God creates out of his love, then for it to be real love, it must be a creation which can run away with itself, for which God may have responsibility, but which, like a human parent he cannot control.

Hence the sea – which humans have always held in awe – and the source of water which has been both a sign of chaos as well as of blessing. When the priest mixes water with wine in the chalice, he or she takes care to bless the water, that its entire propensity to chaos and destruction may be eliminated. The Sea of Galilee, which to most pilgrims and admirers of

biblical prints looks enchantingly calm, is in fact subject to the fiercest and most sudden alterations of disturbance; a gale can blow up in seconds and threaten life and limb. The disciples' fear in the Gospel story was real and true to life.

The prophets in the Old Testament were known to their people not just as men of words; of warning censure and encouragement, but also as performing dramatic and significant gestures intended to be remembered and to speak more loudly than words. Thus Jeremiah shattered an earthenware jug to reveal to the people what God was going to do to them for their disobedience. Hosea married a prostitute and continued to cherish her, despite her infidelities, as a sign that God would not entirely lose faith with his people. Amos used a plumb line to illustrate how God would measure his people in their corruption.

It is not entirely possible to separate Jesus from this tradition and his miracles are not just demonstrations of divine power and intervention, but are intended as signs to be read as indicating that a new age has dawned. Part of the Gospel narrative is the imagery of being lost and yet being found and there is perhaps something of that in this moment of acutest danger when the disciples' boat is buffeted about, and in another story in danger of sinking. The proper response to danger, peril, hopelessness and inadequacy – is not just to make up the deficiencies we see in ourselves, in others, in our equipment; the response is also to have trust in

God. In calming the sea, Jesus is not showing off, but revealing, in the manner of the prophets, the benefits of trusting in God.

But it is the chaos in humanity to which the ministry of Jesus is principally directed. We can all have some sense of life being stormy and never more so than in these days when we go unprotected from all news and especially the bad. One politician, asked what was most difficult in public life simply commented 'events'. It is the unpredictable things which happen which disturb our lives and the fragile calm which we know we need for sanity. The Gospel is not intended that we may glibly sail through life with a grin on our face and a chorus on our lips, for we know that life is for living. And how will our trust in God grow? – only when we start to trust him.

Trust is the discipline of faith and the measure of grace. It might seem easy to trust God with money in our pockets, a contented relationship and a secure home – and when such things are absent we are not called to greater trust. Rather we are called to sift those things which are provisional and temporary to see if we trust them more than God. If such things were taken from us would we still believe God's promises and still greet Jesus when he walks to us on the waters of uncertainty?