

Stormy Weather, Peaceful Shore

October 2023 (1 October - 4 November)



Join us this October as we contemplate the weather: a powerful force — and a powerful metaphor — that shapes all aspects of our lives. We will be reflecting on both literal and figurative storms, and how right there in the midst of it all, Jesus is there beside us: windswept, rain-lashed, and holding on to us, as we hold on to him...

This trilogy of themes began in August with looking *around* at [Habitats of Hope](#), continued in September with looking *back* at [80 Generations](#) and concludes with us looking *up* to the skies! Humans have looked upwards for countless generations, trying to discern patterns and find meaning while seeking shelter and sustenance.

The weather can be both a source of exhilarating joy and terrifying despair. The means of our nourishment and a devastator of our livelihoods. Whether it be through traveling, foraging, cultivating, building, or scientific and technological endeavour we have always had to tune in to the weather — equally reliant upon and wary of it. And so it isn't surprising that the weather gives us a vivid and compelling way of describing our emotional landscape, with all its upheaval, transformation, delights and disappointments.

In storm and wind, rain and sun we have a vocabulary for putting into words the unnerving, exciting and sometimes frightening business of being alive.

But one thing that we can hold on to through all the storms of life is Jesus... because he's holding on to us too. There is no sea too rough and no sky too dark for Jesus to come to our side. Jesus doesn't promise his disciples there won't be storms, but he does say there will be peace, the storm is not all there is.

Storms do end.

There is reason to take hope.

Peace is not only possible, it's ultimately what is being realised through his Kingdom of love and compassion.

As the seasons change join us as we explore both the metaphor and reality of stormy weather as it affects our lives. Over the weeks we will be thinking about wind, rain, clouds, peace, calm and ultimately: the Communion of Saints that urges us on through the storms.

SETTING THE SCENE: A visual motif for each week. An optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the 5 week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

Creation cries out (1 October)

How long must the land mourn? As we begin our new theme we are tuning in to the howl of the wind, the rage of the storm, the sighing in the lull — and how we use the imagery of intense weather to talk about intense emotions. We will also consider how extreme weather events can be read as the mourning of an ecosystem in trouble, that is perhaps out of alignment. Creation cries through the storms, literal and figurative, that roll through our world. Creation cries as the equilibrium is disturbed. Creation cries through you and me, looking up at the latest storm to come through... But who is listening?

SETTING THE SCENE: **A STORMY SKY**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT EMOTIONS DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH STORMS?**

1. Jeremiah 12: 1-4

1. **How long must the land mourn?** Listening to the cry of nature itself as pressure mounts and its resources are exploited cruelly.

2. Romans 8: 18-25

2. **Birth cries, the pangs of something new...** Nature doesn't just cry out in despair but also in the effort of birthing something new. Is nature just set dressing for our relationship with God or is it a vibrant participant in God's project of renewal?

3. Psalm 13

4. Exodus 17: 1-7

3. **The storm of longing.** The cry to connect — to be known and acknowledged in the midst of the tumult — runs deep in the fabric of creation, up to and including ourselves.

5. Psalm 40: 1-3

6. Isaiah 55: 1-5

4. **Tapping the rock.** Depending on where we live humans can often have a love-hate relationship with water — it is essential for life but its over abundance or scarcity can be devastating. The atmosphere in the wilderness here is charged with the electricity of a storm as Moses taps the rock. Knowing when and where to tap, when and where to strike, can be the difference between thriving and disaster.

7. Psalm 57: 1

5. **When the storm is over.** When the worst is over and you're sure on your feet the divinely inspired human response... is to belt out a song!

6. **Come one and all.** Storms with their sudden and unpredictable effects can wreak havoc on homes, livelihoods and the wider infrastructure of modern life. Even in our high tech age they can fill us with dread with their horrifying reminder that everything could be swept away. To all in dread, who are fearful, who are thirsty, who long to find a new home, God says: "Come, there is enough, we'll make room."

7. **Taking shelter.** God is with us no matter what. We don't have to have the right mindset, attitude, game plan, credentials, learning, or boxes ticked. We just have to cry out.

Looks like rain (8 October)

Rain is a rich metaphor and essential component of vibrant diverse life. But rain — vital for agriculture and potentially ruinous to buildings and infrastructure — is a multi varied thing in human experience. Rain is a bittersweet sensation — it can be bleak and oppressive or romantic and thrilling. In rain — in its overabundance or scarcity — there is danger as well as life, longing as well as fulfilment, devastation as well as renewal. But even the hardest rain cannot sweep away God's love. Rain sustains us and challenges us, refreshes and restores us — in the journey of water as it rises and falls we see a parable about life: powerful, relentless, awe inspiring, and ultimately renewing.

SETTING THE SCENE: **A VINEYARD**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT HAS RAIN MEANT TO YOU IN YOUR LIFE? DO YOU LIKE IT? HATE IT?**

1. Isaiah 55: 6-11
 1. **A refreshing system.** Taking inspiration from the water cycle to glean insights into God's love that saturates our world.
2. Matthew 4: 24-27
 2. **The rain came tumbling down.** Rain as a metaphor for testing our foundations.
3. Isaiah 5: 1-7
 3. **Cultivating insights.** Rain and sunlight allow us to turn earth and seeds in to food. But sometimes, even with the best intentions, things don't take root. Is there something to learn here about letting go of old places? While the vineyard itself is abandoned that doesn't mean the vine stock itself is forsaken — it can be grafted and planted anew — but the old has to be let go of first. Are we sometimes more bothered with shoring up old walls than in relocating the vine?
4. Matthew 20: 1-7
 4. **Wanting more to join in.** The rains have been good. Plenty of fruit to harvest, and the landowner is happy to hire the 'unhireables' to help.
5. Matthew 20: 8-16
 5. **Raining on the parade.** The dampener of wanting 'more than'.
6. Matthew 21: 33-46
 6. **More tears in the vineyard.** The clouds gather and darken as those underneath nurture greed, jealousy, avarice and shame. The Kingdom is an invitation to join in heartily, not something to sit back and manipulate for advantage.
7. 2 Samuel 23: 2-4
 7. **Perusing petrichor...** David at the end of his long and varied life reflects bittersweetly on the aftermath of rain, the shimmer of possibility sparkling in the land. As his life comes to a close he is drawn to thinking about the fresh promise of a new day... and an ideal of leadership that he himself in his fallible human nature could not always live up to. Rain can be bleak or romantic, depressing or exhilarating, miserable or hopeful depending on how we experience it — but in its returning it speaks relentlessly of life and renewal like the generative, restorative leadership of God's kingdom.

Sunlight through the clouds (15 October)

God does not promise us a life without storms, but we are promised that we are not alone. This week we reflect on the shafts of light that break into our everyday lives, the light that illuminates the sky and warms our souls. In literal and figurative storms we are never forgotten, abandoned, written off.

Always there is a light left on.

SETTING THE SCENE: **SUNLIGHT BREAKING THROUGH CLOUDS**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WEATHER IS A POPULAR METAPHOR IN SONGWRITING, WHAT SONGS ABOUT THE WEATHER CAN YOU THINK OF, DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVOURITES?**

1. Isaiah 55: 12-13
 2. Psalm 139: 7-12
 3. Matthew 5: 43-48
 4. John 8: 12
 5. 1 John 1: 5-10
 6. Isaiah 9: 2-7
 7. Isaiah 60: 19-20
1. **Thorn and brier is not all there is.** In this passage the land joins in with the wider story of restoration. The relief of sunshine, of the wind dying down, of the thunder abating — vividly expresses the calm we find when turmoils in our life pass. Overloaded senses get a chance to recalibrate, muscles to relax, nervous system to dial down.
 2. **Deeply known.** We may feel lost in the tumult, gone without trace, but we are never forgotten or truly alone, we are remembered, we are known, we are found.
 3. **It's not just your sunshine.** The sunlight that breaks through the clouds is the same sun that warms us all. God doesn't have favourites. The majesty of God's love is not that we make the best most elite team, it's that he wants to recruit all of us! God is not wonderful because we are singled out, God's wonderful because we aren't... because none of us have to prove we are worthy of sunshine.
 4. **The light of the world.** Reflecting on times when the light of life has glimmered in the darkness.
 5. **Dispersing the clouds of hypocrisy.** When we try to deceive God, when we try to deceive others, when we try to deceive ourselves — God's light can break through the clouds and give us a reality check.
 6. **Hope dawns.** Let's say a prayer that our souls might be warmed.
 7. **Everlasting light.** When all the candles have guttered out, when the lanterns are spent, and the leckie's been cut off — there is an everlasting light that can never be put out.

In the eye of the storm (22 October)

In the penultimate week of our theme we come to the eye of the storm, the centre of the whirlwind... the uncanny places in the midst of the tumult where the pressure drops and we come face to face with the almighty.

SETTING THE SCENE: **ON A BOAT OUT AT SEA**

SEEDS TO SOW: **IF YOU WERE TO PAINT A PICTURE OF JESUS CALMING THE STORM, HOW WOULD YOU DO IT? HOW WOULD YOU DEPICT JESUS'S ACTION? DESCRIBE THE PICTURE.**

1. 1 Kings 19: 11-13
 2. Luke 8: 22-25
 3. Jonah 2
 4. Luke 15: 11-20
 5. Job 38: 1-3, 22-38
 6. Acts 27: 27-44
 7. Psalm 32: 7
1. **Out of silence.** Elijah searches in the storm but finds God in the quiet.
 2. **Jesus isn't Thor or Odysseus.** In other stories, about other heroes, the storm would be used as a tool, perhaps as a weapon, or a point of leverage to get one over on an adversary. But Jesus doesn't co-opt or manipulate the storm, harnessing it for his own ends. He simply finds a way to calm it.
 3. **Fish Belly Prayer.** What's a Fish Belly Prayer that you could pray today — a prayer of longing from deep waters?
 4. **Pig Sty Prayer.** What's a Pig Sty Prayer that you could pray today — a prayer of dawning realisation from the muck and mire?
 5. **Out of the whirlwind.** A blistering, bombastic response from God that vividly uses the weather to convey a glimpse of the awesome nature of God that goes so far beyond language itself. Like Job we are left standing in awe.
 6. **Stop, eat, lighten the load.** All at sea and Paul urges them all to take a moment to rest, to eat. They are on the eve of shipwreck but they take time to collect themselves, to fuel for the shipwreck ahead.
 7. **Our hiding place.** We pray for all those who need a hiding place with God today, who are crying out in the midst of storms.

All Saints whatever the weather (29 October)

Having travelled through this stormy theme the last four weeks we come at last to the peaceful shore, the second part of our title. All Saints Days falls in this final part of the theme. It is a day when we remember all the saints: all the saints that have been, all the saints there are, and all the saints that are to come! We are a heavenly collective. We are all connected and we all matter. None of us are insignificant. We belong to God, and through God we belong to one another.

We all have a part to play. We saints on a mission from God. To live lives committed to those who need us and connected to the realities of heaven — of goodness and kindness and hope. Lighthouses guiding the storm-wrecked to peace. Through Communion we are connected to a cloud of saints urging us on. The storm is not all there is. There is peace too, hard won.

SETTING THE SCENE: A PEACEFUL BEACH

SEEDS TO SOW: WHAT DOES IT MEANT TO BE A SAINT?

1. **2 Corinthians 6: 1-13**
 1. **Get your umbrella and open wide your heart.** The sometimes counterintuitive but heartening dancing-in-the-rain life of faith.
 2. **Finding peace as we rest in God's love.** Being cared for in the sustaining love of God.
 3. **Inner peace.** Through the storms of life that assail us from the outside, we remember that Jesus works transformation from the inside-out too giving us space and time for our spirits to heal.
 4. **A peaceful shore.** Wiping away tears.
 5. **All Saints.** Through all weathers, there is a cloud of saints urging us on!
 6. **Smelling the sweet scent of the prayers of the saints.** A vivid sensory picture, inviting us to consider prayers rising through the air. What would happen if we pictured our prayers actually as literal molecules rising to heaven to mingle with other molecules to form great clouds?
 7. **We don't watch for the morning alone.** We are connected through Jesus — outside of time and space — to all the saints who have ever been: the Communion of Saints who guide us towards peace.
2. **John 15: 9-11**
3. **Psalm 51: 10-12**
4. **Isaiah 25: 1-9**
5. **Hebrews 12: 1-2**
[All Saints Day]
6. **Revelation 5: 8**
7. **Psalm 130: 5-6**