

+WEEKLY REFLECTION

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Small boat crisis

Last week I was listening to the story of Jinyi. With her husband, Jinyi had planted a church in central China.

As the church grew, it attracted the attention of the government. And one day the police arrived at church. All those gathered were detained. Jinyi's husband, Zhang, was sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

For many Christians around the world today, the reality of persecution can feel very lonely and frightening. For all of us, the storms of life can feel overwhelming. We can feel as though God is absent or asleep.

In this Sunday's gospel reading (Matthew 14:22-33), the storm is real. Immediately after feeding the 5000, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and sail across to the other side of the lake.

The situation echoes Matthew's account of Jesus calming the storm (Matthew 8:23-27). But there's a big difference: this time Jesus is not in the boat. The disciples don't have the luxury of being able to wake him. He is not there.

When he does appear to them in the early hours of morning, he is walking on the lake. The exhausted disciples are terrified. They think they've seen a ghost.

Jesus assures them with a simple statement: 'It is I.' Matthew's Jewish audience would immediately make the connection: this is the God of the Exodus, the great I AM, who led his people through the waters of the Red Sea. This is the God who brings his people home.

Storms will come in our lives. It may be that we've had an unexpected diagnosis, a relationship has broken down, or we're going through a tough time at work or school. Perhaps our church is going through a tough time. The future looks uncertain.

Remarkably the church that Jinyi serves is continuing to grow. Some 70 young people are continuing to meet in small house churches, inspired by Jinyi's courage.

She puts it like this: "There have been countless moments when I wanted to give up. I felt like I really couldn't carry the burden of leading these young people, but God's calling was always there, and He upheld me."

The assurance of the passage from Matthew is that the storms are ultimately under the authority of our Lord Jesus. And that he is the One who will bring us to our ultimate Home.

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