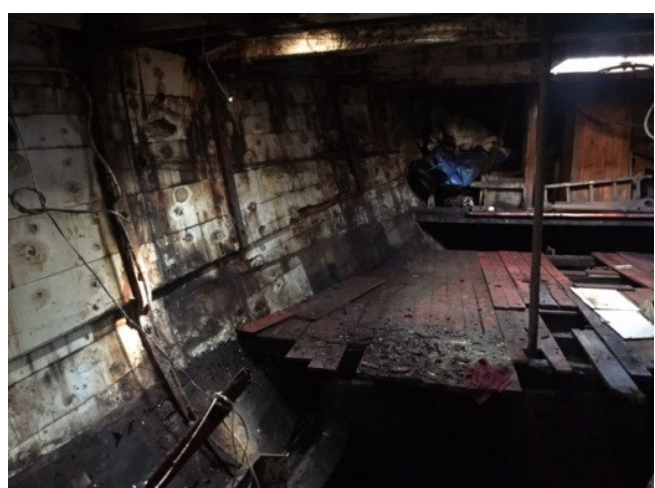


THE VOYAGE

Very early on the morning of Wednesday 14th September Nick Szkiler and I set off from Girvan Harbour, in south west Scotland aboard a Redbay Storm Force 11 ten-passenger RIB 'Glenapp Castle'. We were headed for the boatyard of Redbay Boats in Cushendall, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, a distance of 41 miles across the Irish Sea. This was Nick's first solo crossing as skipper. The third crew member was Iain McClymont a retired RNLI crewman with more than 50 years sailing. The weather forecast for the day was set fair and we made the crossing via the island of Ailsa Craig in just over 2 hours.



We left the boat at the boatyard for its scheduled repair and set off in a borrowed Nissan pickup for Strangford Loch - a couple of hours drive south east - in order to view for a prospective purchaser a converted three-masted sailing ship, 'Regina Caelis' [i.e. Queen of Heaven!], which was being sold for a very low price since it required renovation.

We found the boat to be completely rotten, inside and out; it was completely unfit for purpose and would literally take hundreds of thousands of pounds and a great many years of work to restore. This begged the question *'Is this a completely hopeless case and therefore a waste of time to even begin to attempt such a restoration?'* The answer to this question from our experienced former RNLI crewman was *'I wouldn't even think about it; this vessel will never be sea-worthy again.'* So we returned to the boatyard at Cushendall to collect the 'Glenapp Castle' ready to head back to Girvan.

When we reached Cushendall the boat repairs were not quite finished so we had to wait 15 minutes or so before embarking on our return journey. The sun was shining and it seemed such a lovely evening but once out of the sheltered bay it became apparent that the water was slightly choppier than it had been during the morning. Looking at the sea and sky ahead of us it never occurred to Nick or I that perhaps we should check for an update on the weather forecast; if it occurred to Iain he never mentioned it to us. Had we done so we might have chosen to stay overnight in the safety of the Antrim harbour and not ventured out into what proved to be a very challenging and difficult voyage.

By the time we had covered 19 miles a combination of wind, tide and current in the North Channel caused the sea state to change significantly; Redbay's Storm Force 11 boat with its twin engines and 580 horsepower is designed to ride over the waves at speed but as the conditions quickly worsened we found ourselves being repeatedly tossed up by 20 foot waves out of the water only to come crashing down at full force into the sea; a force so strong that we were literally thrown out of our seats. Our physical bodies were jarred and wrenched by the ferocity of the storm and very quickly it stopped being even remotely funny and became very uncomfortable indeed.



Our crewman Iain never attempted to give Nick advice but left the captaincy of the boat entirely in his hands, however whenever Nick turned to him with a question he always answered with the single word 'correct'. Iain was very wisely allowing Nick to learn first-hand the valuable lessons which, as a relatively new skipper, he needed to learn through this experience.

Once we reached the half-way point of the crossing we had already been travelling for longer than it took us to make the outward journey. I was simply praying that it would soon be over and Nick was praying asking the Lord how to best tackle the unrelenting ferocity of the rough seas we were facing and also how we were to get safely into harbour in the encroaching darkness.



[Photo of us approaching Girvan Harbour from the south west taken by the Harbour Master]:

The Lord answered by giving Nick wisdom to 'tack' the waves and to drive at right-angles for a period of time at a higher speed than we could maintain 'head-on' to the waves. This substantially reduced the severity of the turbulence but it also meant a longer journey with the result that we approached Girvan from the south west rather than directly west. Eventually, after three and a half hours at sea, with only a little moonlight to see the surface by, Nick could see the Girvan harbour lights. He carefully steered a path past the lobster pots close to the harbour approach any one of which could have snagged the stern drives. Having found the double green light at the harbour mouth; we slipped battered, bruised and bone-tired into the safety of our pontoon at Girvan's marina .

During the rough crossing our communication mast had been dislodged which meant we were unable to contact Belfast Coastguard (or they us) and Roddy the Harbour Master was astonished having spoken by phone to Iain that we had made the return crossing that evening at all. He expected we would have checked the updated forecast before setting out and sensibly chosen to stay overnight in Antrim. Had we done so we would never have learned the following spiritual lessons that we believe God meant us to. As we waited on God together with a group of like-minded friends over Tabernacles 2016 it seemed to me that the Lord was prophetically interpreting almost every stage of our day out.

THE INTERPRETATION

THE STORM

For more than a decade God has been warning those who have 'ears to hear' of an approaching 'storm' on the nations of the world. Our own prophetic words of 2008 and 2015 bear witness to this. In scripture we find this 'storm' described by the minor prophets as the great and dreadful Day of the Lord; where the nations are judged for their mass turning away from God and their willingness or otherwise to stand with God's end-time purposes for His people Israel. The objective of this is not simply God's righteous judgement being outworked but that through this shaking masses of people would turn back to God - the final ingathering - that is the catalyst for Messiah's glorious return.

During our Gathering over Tabernacles 2016 a prophetic utterance was given through which God indicated that the time of the 'storm' was at hand and that the only reliable point of safety would be found in the One who is our Refuge, Hiding Place, Source and Provision. In fact He longs for us to urgently take the remaining days of relatively 'peaceful' weather to actively strengthen the depth of our relationship with Him now, ahead of the 'storm's' ferocity so that when we suddenly find ourselves in unrelenting choppy storm-force 'waves' we will not be as inwardly shaken as some and so capable of helping others.

When Nick and I set out from Girvan for our day trip to Antrim the weather forecast gave no mention of an approaching storm so we believed it. Had we made regular updates throughout the day we would have known that the forecast had changed and the storm was already on its way; we would not have been lulled into a false sense of reality. Speaking prophetically the BBC continues to lull our nation into the false sense of well-being; that there's nothing really very much to concern ourselves about: it's dreadful that the Beeb has lost the Bake Off to Channel 4 but Strictly is back to brighten the dark evenings and all's almost well with the world! These glitzy sparkly Strictlyfied 'weather forecasts' offer little meaningful substance and mask the serious reality of what is happening and developing on the world's social, political, economic and religious fronts. Those who are watching the true spiritual 'climate' already see that the 'storm clouds' are gathering, the 'waters' are no longer peaceful, the 'temperature' has dropped and the first signs of choppiness on the water indicates that the 'storm' is now tangibly close.

Our return journey was just over three and a half hours. As we waited on the Lord over Tabernacles I felt He revealed that each hour of our journey was an analogy of each year of the three and half years of great trial, testing and persecution that is coming on the whole world. It will begin mildly 'choppy' (as it is now) but quickly intensify to be so powerfully unrelenting and unpleasant that we will literally be praying throughout every moment for at least the mid two and a half year period for it to be over; devout in prayer and utterly reliant on God's counsel, wisdom, power and imparted knowledge. Only in the very latter days of the intense trial will the 'lights' of the 'harbour' offer any degree of hope and safety so that we might experience the overwhelming spontaneous joy of our eventual seemingly miraculous deliverance.

Nick and I continue six weeks after our ordeal to bear the aches and pains resulting from the shaking we experienced in our physical bodies but our spirits are not wounded. If anything we carry a greater assurance that as our world is already beyond the tipping point, God WILL work in the midst of this great judgement to gather in the end-time harvest. He is already purifying, training, equipping and releasing His servant-hearted bride to go about the serious work of prayer and evangelism. This vital work will continue and the purification will intensify; His servants will be honed through what lies ahead. A bride is being prepared to carry God's presence to the needy, lost and bewildered of society who have been battered and bruised by the severity of the 'storm'.

JESUS IN THE BOAT

It seems very strange that crewman Iain remained virtually silent throughout the whole long journey home. He literally only answered to affirm the decisions already made by Nick. It is also worth noting that whilst we were being tossed around by every violent hit of the waves he remained steadfastly glued to his seat and never moved so much as a muscle. It was just as if the storm did not affect him one iota probably because as an RNLI crewman he had seen and experienced far worse!

It seems he was being used by God to give us an illustration of the silent, peaceful presence of Jesus - Lord of the 'Storm' - who is beyond being shaken by it. As we progress through the years of the 'storm' and are continually confronted head-on by circumstances that are beyond our experience, knowledge or ability to work out, God has powerfully demonstrated to us that He will be constantly available whenever we ask to simply answer 'correct' or guide us to a workable solution; Jesus will be an invisible guiding reassuring presence with us in the 'boat' for as long as the 'storm' lasts. Although we will be severely shaken, He will remain steadfast.

THE TWO BOATS

It seemed to Nick and I like a bit of an aside to borrow the pickup and travel over two hours south to look at a doomed wooden sailing vessel; this part of the trip seemed to bear no relation to the sea crossing and what the Lord taught us about the 'storm'. However on the morning following the Tabernacles Gathering the Lord revealed its relevance to me: He had given us an analogy of the institutional church that is largely still modelled after 19th Century shapes and structures (even if it appears to look modern from the outside). What follows might also be true of some of the mission organisations that were founded in the 19th Century at the height of the evangelistic fervour and social reforms of that time.

Is it possible that the Lord might be echoing what our experienced RNLI sailor had said: *'these once mighty vessels would never be sea-worthy again'*. Why?

They look alright on the outside; but maybe their structure below deck is not as sound as it appears at first glance?

Are they too large and unwieldy to have the flexibility needed to dip and dive and change course rapidly?

Are people holding on to them out of sentimentality or what they represent in terms of pride and the ocean-going power or prestige of a former age?

Do they have masts but no sails? The wind of the Holy Spirit can never 'blow' a ship on course if it has no sails.

Whilst these are all valid reasons the real basis has not so much to do with the boat per se but with the sea: in these days it is **the nature of the sea they would have to sail and negotiate that has changed**. These one-time kings of the spiritual 'ocean' and vital supply carriers and exporters of the gospel all around the globe are now ill-designed and largely unequipped to face the severity of what is coming on the world. Their structure also lacks the vital ability to suddenly disappear and go underground as and when the need arises.

Acts 27 and 28 recounts the story of Paul's missionary journey to Rome. Through the stupidity of the pilot and boat owner to disobey God's instructions given through Paul, the journey ended in a shipwreck and near disaster for all on board. The storm was unrelentingly powerful for more than two weeks but despite the crew bracing the ship and doing almost everything they knew to save the vessel, it was still a hopeless case. In the face of such a tempestuous sea it was doomed to break up and sink without trace.

If during the season of the encroaching 'storm' Messiah's Body is to be truly effective in carrying His life, presence and glory to a watching needy world, as well as providing a place of refuge and safety, it needs a modern much smaller shape that is especially designed to not only weather the storm but, as much as it is able, to glide over the tops of the waves rather than be subjugated to them and broken apart by their power.

The Storm Force 11 motor boat is a wonderful picture of what might be achieved in the days ahead by a small craft that has been specifically designed, shaped, equipped and set apart for one dedicated purpose: to safely carry its passengers at speed in rough offshore conditions. It has a new shape with a deep V-Hull and 'hard nose' designed specifically to prevent the craft disintegrating in the type of conditions that would see other craft break up.

Over the past thirty years or so God has been working to reshape and restructure His Body: He has been restoring much of the vital simplicity that was the nature of the early church. This is often marked by a focus on building relationship with God and one another as well as living and demonstrating the message and power of God's Kingdom instead of a preoccupation with numbers, buildings and organisational structure. Centred in the intimacy of people's homes or prayer houses, rather than large public buildings, this simpler uncluttered model has the ability to put all its efforts and finance into the basic work of the Kingdom: worship, prayer, fellowship, discipleship training, evangelism and ministering to the poor and needy. Without realising it many of us have been in God's training school as He has renewed our thinking and reshaped our callings in order that we may be serious, sober, set apart members of many small end-time 'motor launches' each one of which is incredibly powerful and capable of functioning in the fullness of the five-fold ministry but also having the ability to quickly adapt in order to 'tack' the worst of the 'wind' and 'waves'; as a model of church it is also small enough to be hidden if the need arises.



A BRAND NEW BOAT

Even a Storm force 11 has its limitations: having made this trip to Antrim for the boat to be repaired the same part failed again on the first trip out of harbour the following week. Instead of making a return trip to Cushendall for the boat to be repaired yet again Red Bay Boats ordered a brand new propulsion drive unit. The company were being used to show us that make-overs won't do for this next season: even things that appear to be reasonably new and up to date can fail if not properly maintained or become superseded.

Interestingly the '*Glenapp Castle*' was previously Redbay's demonstrator boat and in their ownership was named the '*Corryvreckan*'. During Nick's skipper training he travelled on the boat down the '*Corryvreckan*'s' namesake – the Gulf of Corryvreckan - a treacherous stretch of water which lies between Jura and Scarba in the Hebrides. It is also called the 'Great Race' and is the third largest whirlpool in the world.

In Adamnán of Iona's '*Life of St Columba*' he writes: '*Likewise, another day, while St Columba was in his mother church, he suddenly smiled and called out: "Cólman mac Beognai has set sail to come here, and is now in great danger in the surging tides of the whirlpool of Corryvreckan. Sitting in the prow, he lifts up his hands to heaven and blesses the turbulent, terrible seas. Yet the Lord terrifies him in this way, not so that the ship in which he sits should be overwhelmed and wrecked by the waves, but rather to rouse him to pray more fervently that he may sail through the peril and reach us here."*

As a result of this recent experience a completely new and redesigned boat is about to be ordered called the Storm Force 12! We need to be particularly aware of what God is doing in,

with and through us in this season; if He requires a new 'boat' instead of an older one made over, we must do what He says. Our lives and those of others could depend on it!

THE CHALLENGE

The obvious consequence of this prophetic parable is the challenge to the body of Christ for this season. There is an increased need for united intercession and worship, to become serious about being obedient disciples, to pursue greater purity and holiness, to wrestle with some of the 'hard sayings' of Jesus about the cost of following Him, to lay aside all earthly agendas and determine to build only God's kingdom.

On a practical level *every household* should raise up a storehouse of basic foodstuffs and *every church* should prayerfully determine before God what practical preparations should be made to respond in such a scenario. This is a time for urgent action based on prayer.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Isaiah 60:1-3

God has laid it on our hearts to share this word with whosoever will welcome us and listen so please feel free to contact me (Sarah) or pass it on through your trusted networks.

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