

A Reflection on Matthew 14 vs 22 – 33. Sunday 9th August 2020

Loving God, your word which has spoken to so many and continues to speak to us today; receive our praise in the name of Christ. Amen.

If you have ever been at sea in a small boat, miles from dry land, when the wind gets up and a squall threatens a storm bringing large waves crashing over your bow, it can be a very scary experience, particularly if you're unaccustomed to sailing.

Our gospel reading today of Jesus walking on water is a very familiar story from Matthew, which also appears in two other gospels. But it's the only gospel story that has Peter also stepping out of the boat. Now Peter and the other disciples were used to being out on the water and they have already had a previous experience of being in a gale in a boat with Jesus. But the difference this time is that Jesus isn't with them.

Jesus has, this very day, miraculously fed five thousand people and healed many of them in his compassion. Now he wants to go alone up the mountain to pray, because he does nothing without being rooted in His Father's loving direction. We are told that at this time the boat is being literally battered by waves and through the following early morning storm the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the water.

They are terrified. Fearing a ghostly vision, they cry out to Jesus who tells them to cheer up and not be afraid. 'I am', He says. We have heard these familiar reassurances before and so has Peter. When Jesus says, 'Come', Peter, without a second thought, steps out of the boat and begins to walk towards Jesus.

It's only when he takes his eyes off Jesus, looks at his surroundings, moves from faith to doubt, that he begins to sink. But he doesn't choose to swim back to the boat, no, he cries out, 'Lord save me'. And Jesus is so close to him that he catches his hand and they get back in the boat. And like in their previous experience when Jesus calmed the storm, the wind immediately drops. All is well. They are in the Presence of The Son of God.

There are cynics who would say that this simply didn't happen. They would say that the story is really about the state of the church at that time. In some biblical literature the sea is often used to represent evil and chaos and forces which are hostile to God. Others would say that Jesus was walking on a

sandbar. Yet others would say that this is a post resurrection story. How odd that Jesus can walk on water post resurrection but not before!

Surely the real story here is about a miracle? Is it right to pick and choose which miracles we believe and which we do not? Surely this is a matter of faith: the real evidence is about changed lives. A question we might want to ask ourselves is 'How has knowing Jesus changed my life and me?'

This reading is for anyone who has known a storm in their life. God sent Moses to the Israelites- 'tell them 'I am' He said. Well 'I am' is present and calling to us today. A person who has never failed, as Peter does, has never done anything. It's in our failures that we learn to reach out and trust God's word to us.

What can we learn from this passage today? That we look to Jesus and do not allow worldly distractions to take our eyes off Him. That we do what Jesus asks, even when we don't always understand why. Faith is simply taking the next step and often involves the supernatural. That fear can sink us and even a tiny mustard seed of faith gives God the open door He asks us for.

I am reminded of the much-loved 'Footprints' story where only one set of prints can be seen in the sand. 'Where were you Lord when I needed you?' asks the troubled person. The reply comes back, 'where you see only one set of footprints-that's when I carried you'. Amen.