

Sermon for Sunday 09/08i/2020 on Zoom

Matthew 14: 22 -33

Jesus walks on water

I began to prepare for writing this sermon by reading the passage from all the Gospels. To discover there were many similarities and a few differences. Matthew, Mark, and John all record the story of Jesus walking on water, but Luke does not. The similarities are

It is I

Jesus went to pray.

The disciples were terrified.

Jesus urged the disciples to have courage.

Jesus was walking on water.

Jesus looked like a ghost.

That as soon as Jesus got into the boat the storm was stilled.

On the other hand, the differences are

Only Matthew records that Peter got out of the boat and attempted to walk on water.

Matthew's account is more detailed than either Mark's or John's. In all the various versions of Matthew's account he says, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The scene takes place along the shoreline of the lake of Galilee set in the evening after a long day of ministry. The disciples, at this point had no idea of Jesus' identity and the general population wanted to make him their king in order to overthrow their Roman oppressors. This, as we know was not to be the role of Jesus. He had more important business to undertake for his God. No! Jesus wished to be alone to talk to the Father about his future and the untimely death of his cousin John, at the hands of Herod and Herodias.

The crowds were sent away and the disciples whose 'day job' was as fishermen were sent off in a boat to sail across the lake to the town of Capernaum, leaving Jesus to walk alone across the hills. Jesus waved farewell to his friends promising to meet them in the morning. What had not been accounted for was that the lake of Galilee well known for sudden storms would turn from calm to

stormy waters. Tossing the small boat around in the swell the disciples struggled to steer their way through the high winds and waves. Leaving them soaked, cold, and with blistered hands. Anxious to reach land they are all looking at the horizon. When someone spies a shadowy figure walking across the turbulent sea towards them. "It's a ghost!" they shout. Immediately the 'ghost' speaks saying, "Take heart, it is I, have no fear." Peter does not trust the reassuring voice, scared to death, but putting into words none of the others would utter. Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." This seems a very strange way to discover the identity of the approaching figure. Why not say, "Lord if it is you, stop this storm right now.

Instead Peter seems to be wanting to test his faith: show me that what you can do, I can do if only you tell me too.

"Come" Jesus says, so the brash, passionate Peter swings his legs over the side of the boat, takes a deep breath, stands then takes a tentative step towards Jesus. He is doing fine until a gust of wind almost topples him over, and he gets scared and begins to sink below the waves. "Lord, save me" Peter cries and Jesus reaches out and hauls him out of the cold water. The other disciples help drag him aboard the little boat. And then they hear the words, "O you of little faith."

Addressing Peter, Jesus asks, "Why did you doubt?"

These are words none of us wants to hear and yet they are the same words many of us say to ourselves. "Why don't I have more faith?" "Why can't I trust God?" "Why am I afraid to let go and allow God to care for me?" We believe we are in the hands of God, but then negate situations arise testing our faith and we begin to sink below the waves of our own making.

I believe that God is present in the world, but terrible things keep happening. The news headlines seem to reiterate that storms will never end, they will be for ever with us. I also believe in life after death and a future with God but then people I know get sick and are given a diagnosis of six, maybe nine months. I pray for miracles but so often they do not materialise. I pray for the reassuring voice of God, but no voice comes and metaphorically my feet and legs begin to disappear beneath the waves, and I begin to sink.

Why do I doubt? I think because the sea of life is so vast, and we are just like the small boat negotiating the storms which inevitably come. Like Peter we do

have a little faith, and a little bit is better than no faith at all, but there are times when it does not seem enough to save us.

Let us turn the story upside down and imagine that Peter had not sunk. What if he had jumped out of the boat with confidence and glided across the waves to Jesus? And further- more all the other disciples had followed suit? It would have been a different story. It might have been a better one, but it would not have been a story about us. Because the truth about us is that we obey and fear, walk and sink. We do both. Our faith and our doubt co-exist buoying us up and bearing us down, giving us both courage and feeding our fears.

These are the reasons why we need Jesus. Our fears and doubts may paralyze us, but they also make us call out for his saving touch. If we never sink and could, so to speak, walk on water we would have no need for a Saviour. When we sink, as Peter does and we all do, our Lord reaches out responding with grace and then judgement. "Why did you doubt?" But there is no rejection. He returns us to the boat, knowing that we are in the boat in the first place because we believe or want to believe, and because we follow him through our doubtful days. Supported in this by our Christian brothers and sisters enabling us to say, "Truly you are the Son of God."