

Reflection Sunday 9th August

Reading: Matthew 14:22-33

Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. ²³ After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; ²⁴ and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

²⁵ Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. ²⁶ When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear.

²⁷ Jesus spoke to them at once. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!"

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up. "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you."

²⁹ "Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried.

³¹ At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

³² They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. ³³ Then the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus. "Truly you are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.



Of the twelve disciples we know that at least seven of them were fishermen. The Sea of Galilee, which is not actually a sea but a freshwater lake, some 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, would have been their workplace so they would have been used to experiencing different conditions, and storms could occur quickly without warning, as seems to have happened here. Perhaps the non-fishermen amongst the crew were starting to get somewhat concerned at the change in the sea state, and then on top of that they look out amongst the waves and the spray in the hazy first light of morning and see what they think is a ghost coming towards them. What an end to a day! They had spent the previous day sharing 5 loaves and 2 small fish with a crowd of thousands and now they are woken by a storm and a ghost. Nothing seems to be going quite according to plan - what had been a wonderful day with Jesus is now getting out of control. Jesus had needed some time alone, and had sent them ahead of him across the lake. Presumably all was calm and peaceful when they set off but they didn't stay that way and now things are starting to look dangerous.

It is very appropriate that this passage should be our reading for today. I think we can relate to it in many ways at the moment, and there are lots of things we can take away from it to reflect on.

Church life, which had seemed to be ticking along for decades in a settled pattern that we were all used to has suddenly been turned on its' head. Back at the end of March we were told we were not allowed into our buildings anymore and that church services of any kind had to cease immediately.

Our storm had arrived. Our boat was adrift and we were not sure what was going to happen. But Christ came to us in our hour of need. He has shown us and guided us in new ways of 'being church'. We have discovered online services, radio broadcasts, tv programmes that have allowed us to join a virtual congregation and to listen to God's Word and pray together even though we are each in our own front room. We have kept in touch with each other, making sure everyone is doing okay. And like the disciples in the boat, Jesus has come alongside us in our storm and stilled the waters a little so that once again we are starting to feel a bit more secure. We are getting used to the way things are done now. The 'new normal' as it is being called, whether or not we like that terminology. We like being able to listen to a service at a time that suits us without even having to leave our homes. Our boat is starting to feel more comfortable.

But the storm is brewing again, but hopefully you will agree that this is a storm we are actually looking forward to. We are now allowed to re-open our church buildings for worship and other services and we hope to be doing that at Meldrum Church very soon.

Once again we are being tossed and turned as we try and work out how church worship will be whilst we still have to physically distance and are unable to shake hands or sing hymns. Will we return to the same format of the past, or will we see this as an

opportunity to reshape and remodel for a new decade and a new normal? How will we continue to work together as God's family? Quite simply - how are we going to do things from now on?

Peter saw Jesus walking on the waves and asked Jesus to let Him join Him there. I wonder what he felt like as he stepped out of the boat onto the lake with the storm still raging about him? He kept his eyes on Jesus and discovered that he too could walk on water - the only man in history ever to do so!

Are we being asked to step of our boat and trust Jesus? Are we being asked to leave the comfort of the old and what we knew and to trust Jesus to guide us forward to a new and different future?

When Peter took his eyes of Jesus and actually realised the enormity of what he was doing he started to sink. When he called out to Jesus to save him Jesus scooped him up and the two of them got back in the boat and the storm ceased. At that moment the other disciples finally realised that Jesus really was the Son of God.

Jesus invited Peter out of the boat and in doing so Peter was able to achieve something he could not possibly have done on his own.

Are we being encouraged to step out of our comfort zone and try something new? If we are, then I believe it can only be achieved if Jesus is inviting us, and if we keep our eyes on Him. Whatever we decide to do, and the direction in which we go may take many weeks and months to form properly, we need to constantly ask Jesus to be with us and guide us so that we can survive the storm.

When Jesus saved Peter from drowning they both got back into the boat. The other disciples were still in the boat. Jesus didn't admonish them for not trying. He didn't tell them they too should have got out of the boat and walked on water. He got back into the boat with them.

Whichever way the church decides to navigate its' path through the new way of worshipping together, or being 'church' together, we can be assured that if we keep our eyes on Jesus, ask Him to show us the way and trust Him to lead us, then He will be with us as our guide and our strength. However, the security of the boat is still there. We can choose to stay in it if we wish, and Jesus will not abandon us but will still be with us.

It is not only the church that is being challenged to get out of the boat. Jesus is inviting each one of us to step out of our boat and trusting in Him so that we too can experience the joy of being part of something that we can't even begin to imagine at the moment, but we know from what Jesus did in this story, will be completely amazing.

The church and the world in general is at a moment when it can change the way it does so many things. There are things we should take up again, and things we should lay down

as no longer appropriate or needed or necessary. Do we stay in our boat, feeling secure with what we know and what feels familiar and safe, or

Do we get out of the boat - and walk on water?

music

Castling Crowns - Start right here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGvfagBOHJE>

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

The world is in a strange place. All the things that were familiar to us have changed and sometimes we feel a little lost and at sea. Lord we trust you and we want to follow you through the stormy waters as we seek to discover what you are challenging us to take up, and what to put aside. Help us to keep our eyes firmly fixed on you as we work out a new way to serve you in our own lives and how to be your church together. Help us to discern when you are asking us to walk on water, and when you are encouraging us to stay in our boat. In all we do, Lord, may we do it for your glory and not our own.

Amen

Lord,

We pray for the people of Beirut as they struggle to rebuild their homes and their lives after the devastating explosion this week. We pray for healing for those injured and for strength and skill for the medical staff caring for them. We pray for those who lost loved ones, or still don't know if they are alive or dead. Lord, please place your arms of protection around that city and its' people so that they may be kept safe as they work through their sorrow and grief.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen