

Devotional Blog

Sunday 9th August

The Coronavirus Pandemic has brought illness, death, isolation, job losses, business failures, and a massive amount of fear. Life in 2020 seems to be very troubled waters indeed.

It's easy to feel like we are in a tiny boat tossed about by a raging storm and it's not unreasonable to ask, "Where's God in all this?"

Well, Matthew's Gospel (14:22-33) offers us an answer. But it's quite scary—for God wants us to get out of the boat! What?

The story goes like this: Jesus and his disciples are parted. He's alone on the mountain, above it all, communing in peace with the Father. They're in the thick of it, on the water, battling against a force 9. Then Jesus comes to them.

He joins his disciples in the storm of their lives. You'd think that would be good news. But it isn't. It makes matters worse. The disciples now have two things to fear – first the storm, and then this ghost walking on the waves. Surely, they're sunk!

But no! Jesus shouts to them. His voice rising above the storm: "It is I". Impulsive Peter replies immediately: "Lord, if it is you....." Jesus shouts back, one word: "Come!"

Why would Jesus invite Peter to do something that Peter, like you and I, simply can't do- walk on water? Is it because Jesus never rejects anyone who appeals to him, however impossible (humanly speaking) their situation is?

Peter clammers out of the boat and starts walking. He doesn't get far, but Jesus saves him.

So, why does Jesus walk on water? Is it some dazzling circus stunt that shows off his supernatural powers? No, it is so that his disciples, and us, utterly understand who Jesus is. Like disease and death, the raging sea is one of the unruly powers, but Jesus is the Lord even over the sea, he is Lord over all powers of chaos and destruction that threaten us and the Church.

Peter asks permission to come to Jesus in the sea- he waits for Jesus to say “come”. This is a brief glimpse of what Matthew believes discipleship is all about: obeying Jesus, sharing the fullness of his life and ministry, moving towards him even in the teeth of the storm.

What is clear from this Gospel passage is that we are called to step out in faith, even in the midst of troubled waters, if we are to be faithful to the call of Christ.

Stepping out in faith is not a guarantee that we will not find life’s waters stormy or that we will not be filled with fear. But stepping out in faith brings the assurance that Jesus will not abandon us, that when we need it most, he will extend his arm to lift us up.

The key to faith and fullness of life in Christ is to follow Peter’s example and be willing to step out of the comfort and security of the boat and head into the stormy world to proclaim the love, mercy and justice of God that we find in Jesus Christ.

Yes, of course, this is scary. Fear is a recurring theme in this story. We might think that our faith is not strong enough, but even “little faith” was enough for Peter to get out of the boat- no one else did! Faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain (Matthew 17:20). Despite all of the fear the whole walking on the water event leads up to a mighty confession of faith “Truly you are the Son of God”. When we respond to Jesus, we also get to understand him for real.

Let's have an impulsive desire to get closer to Jesus. Let's ask him to walk on the troubles of our lives, of our world, as he calls us to join him.

We share the prayer of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 16:22):

“Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus, come!”

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership