

Matthew 14: 22 - 33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

²⁸ 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

²⁹ 'Come,' he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, '**Truly you are the Son of God.**'

We've heard recently much about the 2nd Covid 19 wave or may be lots of little waves. In our gospel reading we are told: "the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it." As we battle through the pandemic – we might well think: "Will we ever get to the other side?" Just when we seem to be making progress another wave or squall of wind seems to stop us in our tracks. We feel that like the disciples we are rowing against the wind.

Apply to Covid 19; apply to Laurence Hall rebuilding;

Context: John the Baptist beheaded. J tries to go to a solitary place but pursued by crowds. Feeding of the 5000. When crowds go home, J sends d's ahead so he can have some time alone to pray – all night.

Squall blows up. Previous time this had happened in Matthew 8 J had been with them in the boat this time, they were in the middle of a very dangerous sea and Jesus was miles away on the shore somewhere. D's struggling making no headway at all against the wind. And the waves are threatening to capsize their boat. Where on earth is Jesus ?

J must have been aware of the storm. Mountainside vantage point;
Praying for them. When aware they need him to be there, he comes to them

D's don't recognise him. Fear does funny things to our perception:
Freddy had never seen a plate of jelly. He sat there at the dinner table staring at it for along moment, watching it quiver. "Go ahead and eat it," his mother ordered. "Eat it! It isn't dead yet!"

Just when the disciples think things cannot get any worse than this, they see a ghost!
They are terrified – *cry out in fear* - they completely lose it.

We might wonder how Jesus can possibly walk on the water. But he is the Lord of all creation – just before he had fed the 5000. Later he would conquer death itself

Muhammed Ali, *"Superman don't need no seat belt."* The stewardess quickly came back, *"Superman don't need no airplane, either."*

Jesus don't need no waterskis – because He is the Son of God.

This is how Jesus seeks to reassure them. *"Take courage – It is I."* Not Jesus saying *"It is only me"*, but = *ego eimi I AM* c.f John's gospel - the divine name of God

Peter says: *"If it is really you, tell me to do something that I could not possibly do unless you enable me to do it."*

Jesus says “*Come*” and amazingly Peter does walk on the water for a while. We might think this an even greater miracle than Jesus doing so, for Peter is an just ordinary human being. But God’s destiny for us is that one day we shall reign with him over creation – so maybe one day we shall all be able to walk on water.

We might also think that Jesus doesn’t make it very easy for Peter. He doesn’t calm the sea for him or quieten the wind. The wind continues to blow and the waves continue to crash. But that is how it is. When we first step out of the boat in faith to follow Christ, we might think, now life will be a smooth path. But that is not God’s way. The storms of life do not cease, but Jesus enables us to walk on the waves.

The sea and the waves a picture of chaos, the forces that threaten to overwhelm us viz. painting but Jesus is sovereign over them and J really can enable us like him to walk on the waves – not these waves, but the storms of life, not to be overwhelmed by them or to sink or drown. When we feel we have been rowing against the wind forever and now it is all just becoming too much to cope with

As long as Peter’s eyes were fixed on Jesus, he could walk.

Very nearly there (within arm’s reach of Jesus) – but as soon as he switched attention to the wind and waves he began to sink



Why did Peter doubt? *Viz ppt painting* Size of the waves, ferocity of the wind, perhaps the figure *was* only a ghost or a figment of his imagination; perhaps he doubted the ability of Jesus to overcome his own frailty....

One vital condition: Keep our eyes firmly fixed on Him

As soon as P takes his eyes of J he begins to sink.
APPLY

However, Peter then did probably the most sensible thing he had done all night: He cried out *Lord, save me*

So what did Jesus do? Did he stand back and shout: *It’s all right, just have more faith!*

Or did he let Peter sink and say *Well that’s the way it goes if you don’t have enough faith!* Of course not!

BUT Jesus reached out his hand and caught him Yes, later in the boat he chides him and challenges him because he wants not just Peter but all the other d’s to grow in faith, BUT he also rescues him even though his faith is weak. He doesn’t say *When you have more faith then I might rescue you*. He is never more than an arm’s length away, and we are never out of his reach.

It’s never too late to cry out to Jesus. Maybe for a while you were walking on water, walking by faith. But your focus has slipped. Stopped looking at J and you have been sinking. It’s not too late *Lord, save me*

I have been applying this story to storms, difficulties. But it can also be applied to challenges. *apply to church seeking to build God’s kingdom in a secular society*. For us more specifically, it is a great encouragement with regard to the rebuilding of the Laurence Hall. It feels as if in recent months we have not made much headway against the winds of grant rejections and the waves of corona virus and lockdown. We might wonder where Jesus is in all of this. But even if we cannot see him, he can see us, just as he saw the d’s struggling on the sea of Galilee and he can overcome any storms and make progress against the strongest winds and biggest waves.

Book *If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat*.

Maybe J is calling you out of what is familiar and comfortable. He is saying to you *It is I....Come*. It seems impossible and certainly risky.

John Wimber used to say Faith is spelt with 4 letters: R.I.S.K.

But if Jesus is calling you, then that means he is there, He will enable you to walk on water and if you do begin to sink, He will always be there to catch you.

Jesus and Peter climb into the boat and the wind dies down. John tells us also that in no time they had reached the place they were heading for.

The previous time the disciples were sailing in a storm with Jesus in the boat, in Matthew 8, they asked *Who is this man?*

This time we are told: *the d's worshipped him and said "Truly you are the Son of God."*

When we do step out of the boat in faith, often we will see Jesus with new eyes and discover he is even greater than we realised.