

Yet he had crossed so close to Jesus for when he cried out to Jesus, Jesus reached out to catch him and raise him up. But then Jesus said: You of little faith, why did you doubt?

Surely He was speaking not only to Peter but to the others and to us. We might say, Lord the wind, Lord, the realities of life, Lord who are we to do things beyond our human abilities? But the question was not about worldly realities and human abilities. It was about - what was the point of their disbelief? Being with me so far why cant you be with me further? Why disbelieve?

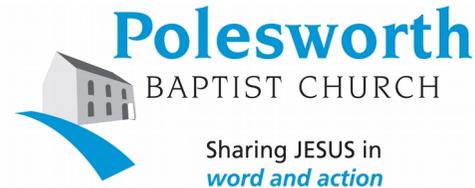
Is our faith a Christmas faith. Bring me to the carols, show me the nativities but please don't take ask me to get out of the boat. Life is stormy, may my acceptable faith shelter me in the storm. I'm doing all a man or a woman can reasonably do. Please don't expect me to do more than I can do as I am.

But to come to Jesus is an invite to trust in Him beyond the limits of ordinary life. It's to become more like Peter.

Peter is the name that Jesus gives him. It means rock and in giving him the name Peter, Jesus says on this rock I will build my church. But He didn't mean Peter the person was that rock. It was his faith that was the rock. The faith that got him out of the boat of relatively safe sitting. The faith that Jesus took hold of when He raised Him up. The faith that Jesus speaks to in us, when we dare to do more in His power than we can achieve in our own abilities.

Come, He says. Come to me. I have overcome the world.
Do not be afraid, I am your shield and your great reward.
It is I, Ego eime, I am and will be with you wherever you go.
Do not worry about what you can or cannot do.
Nothing is impossible for God, as Gabriel said to Mary.
When the storm blows you will be able to overcome it in me.
What is the point of trusting me in the good weather but disbelieving in the foul?
Why doubt?
Come, be willing to get out of the boat, and come to me.
In Me You will do things you never thought were possible.

May all we are and do in Christ shine the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into the world around us so many may come to Christ and be saved.
Amen.



Sunday 21st March 2021
Passion Sunday

Reflecting on Matthew 14: 22-36

After feeding the 5000 men and all the women and children Jesus made the disciples get into their boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, that is the western shore of the lake, while He dismissed the crowd.

Why did He do that? Some read across what John tells us in his gospel to explain this. John tells us that as a result of this miracle the people wanted to make Jesus their king. But He would have none of that. So first He sends the disciples away, knowing that the people's excitement might affect them. Then He sends the crowd off. Then He goes to pray.

We can read that across but perhaps Matthew didn't include it, if he knew about it, because he wants to stress two things. That Jesus sent the disciples off across the lake by boat. There are times when we all must seek to be alone with God. Jesus wanted to be with His Father. Whether He had been resisting the crowd's desire to declare Him king, or was simply exhausted by giving of His teaching and the miracle of the feeding, He needed to gather close to His Father, and to His Father's purposes. Jesus would be Israel's King but not the military king the people wanted. He would provide the nations with bread, but not the worldly bread the people hungered for. He prayed to keep close to His Father and His way. Jesus, as the saying goes always made the main thing the main thing.

And secondly that means Jesus is not with the disciples when the west wind arises, stirring up the waves, stopping their easy crossing to the other side. So it was then, during the 4th Watch of the night that Jesus went out to His disciples, walking on the lake.

The Romans divided the night into 4 watches: 6 to 9; 9 to 12; 12 to 3 and 3 to 6, so Jesus went out to them in the pre-dawn ending of the night. Not a night that was utterly dark, for the fact that the 5000+ sat on grass, green grass Mark tells us, suggests this was spring time, maybe mid-April, Passover time, which was a full-moon season. So Jesus walks on the lake to His disciples struggling against the wind to cross the lake.

If you consulted a map to find the shortest walking way from the eastern to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee it is never going to say go straight across. But at some-time between 3 and 6 am in the morning by the light of the moon Jesus walked across the lake to join His disciples.

Some people find this very hard to believe. They may tell you that the Greek Matthew uses could refer to walking towards the sea rather than on and so he could be telling us that Jesus, coming down from the mountain, saw His disciples and walked toward the sea, through the surf. Coming suddenly upon the disciples in the boat they were terrified when they saw Him.

But words have to be understood in their context. And the context here is that the disciples already a considerable distance from land. They were not near the shore. And there is no hint in the event that Jesus suddenly appeared at the side of the boat startling the disciples. When they Him in the moonlit darkness they were terrified because they thought they saw an apparition. If Jesus was walking in the surf why would Peter ask, "Tell me to come to you on the water"? A phrase that implies distance, and a request for Jesus to stand still on the sea while Peter comes over to Him. If Jesus was in the surf by the shore why would Peter be afraid of the wind? And why would he sink? Unless we get into the realms of imagining he walked into some sort of sink hole. And why when all are gathered in the boat and the wind dies down, would the disciples worship Jesus?

The reality is much simpler. Instead of interpreting the event to fit our sense of the natural and the normal. We are invited to see that the divinity of Jesus the man and the difference faith in Him can make to our lives. The disciple's boat is in the middle of the lake. In their struggle Jesus goes straight out to them, He is not constrained by what a man can or cannot do in the natural world. He do walks on the water. Which completely explains why the disciples imagine they see a ghost for living people cannot walk on water. But then, as ghosts cannot, Jesus speaks to them, saying Take courage! It is I, which in the Greek is ego eime and Don't be afraid.

These words of assurance go way back into God's relationship with His people. As He said when calling Abram: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward. As He said to Moses, at the burning bush, when Moses wanted to know God's name, He answered Ego eime. And again as God said to Joshua, in appointing him to succeed Moses, do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you where ever you go.

The re-assurance Jesus offers the disciples connect Him, the One who has power over the sea, whose voice in a previous storm has calmed the wind and waves, with the One who created the sea. And that's why Peter felt able to ask Jesus, if he could come to Him on the water. And that's why the disciples worshipped Jesus, for in this event they grow in seeing that Truly Jesus is the Son of God.

Then Jesus, going in the compassion of God, recognised by the people of Gennesaret, heals all the sick whom they bring to Him.

Reflection [2] Jesus makes the main thing the main thing. He never lets our good push out the best He has for us. But do we?

Jesus offers us the good of healing to bring us to the best of our salvation. Jesus did not settle for giving us what we think is good – that was the devil's temptation to Him - but came to give us God's best. He never lets our good push out His best. Is that our way?

Consider the people in Gennesaret, who recognising Him rush to bring their sick to Him for healing. They knew Jesus could heal. They begged Him to heal their sick. And He did so. They came to Him for good works but did they commit to Him for saving work? Many were healed but were many saved? To be healed is a good thing but to be saved is the best thing, for healing cannot break through death but salvation is the gate to life.

Let's turn to Peter and celebrate him. He had the trust in Jesus to ask Him: Tell me to come to You on the water. The others sat in the boat. And as they sat in the boat who were they watching: Jesus or Peter? I fancy that their eyes were on Peter. They looked at their leader stepping out for Jesus and when he sank they probably thought they had made the right decision.

I wonder if they thought afterwards, if only I had looked on Jesus and risen up in my faith as Peter did. To look at Jesus their Lord and not at Peter their leader and to step out in Jesus to do something totally beyond their natural expectation & human abilities?

Peter walks out on the water, for in the middle of the storm he trusted in the power of Jesus to enable him to do so. Notice how Jesus responds when Peter asked. He doesn't question him, are you sure? He doesn't tell Peter how to walk on water. He didn't proclaim instructions to the water to let Peter walk on it. He simply said, Come. In that one word the impossible became possible. The voice that spoke creation into being spoke over the waters and they wanting to please Him supported Peter. And all peter had to do was something he did all the time, get out of a boat and walk. Oh the amazing things God's people can do when they trust in Jesus.

Ah but then we see Peter fail and fall, because he saw the wind. The wind had been there all the time. What Matthew is telling us is that Peter suddenly saw the wind as an expression of natural reality, of worldly experience. He saw the wind blowing, and the water waving, and his natural self challenged him: who am I to walk on the sea, what an impossible thing that is! It holed his faith and so he sank.