

Service for Sunday 9 August 2020 Revd Pauline Crispin

In this week's reading we focus on the authority of Jesus, which extends to the created world. In the storms and chaos of our own lives we reflect on the kind of faith which steps out even when we feel vulnerable and afraid.

Jesus said: 'Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.'
Our God is a powerful God,
who does things way beyond our understanding.
But we have no need to fear,
for we know we are safe in God's presence.
Let us come to our God now. Let us bow down and worship.

Lord, sometimes life following you can be difficult.
We find so many dilemmas and struggle so much,
wishing it could be easier.
We so want to trust you and see your plan for us.
Help us this morning to relax into your presence,
to clearly hear your word and be prepared to act on it. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Sing or Read, at least twice:
Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord, in your peace.
Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord, enfold me in your peace.

David Adam (b. 1936)

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**Lord God, I'm sorry for the times I take my eyes off you,
and seek to do things in my own strength.
I'm sorry for the times I doubt that
you can keep me on the straight and narrow.
I'm sorry for the times I ask you for signs.
Lord, I pray that you will forgive
my doubts and hesitations, show me your loving presence,
especially when I most need it,
and teach me to trust you at all times.**

**Lord, though the storms of this life may rage,
let me know the quiet centre within.
When the winds of doubt whisper to my soul,
hold me fast in your belonging.
When the waves of fear overwhelm,
ground me in the unsinkable knowledge of your love and your forgiveness. Amen.**

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The story of Jesus walking on the water is told by Matthew, Mark and John, but not by Luke. Only Matthew tells us how Peter tried to walk on the water too. In Matthew, this episode follows immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, which, as we saw in last week's reading, followed the breaking of the news of John the Baptist's death. Jesus is still trying to get away by himself, and this time actually succeeds. He not only gets away from the crowd, but from the disciples too. He sends them off in a boat across the lake, telling them he will catch them up later. During the night they are caught in a storm and can make no headway. The placid looking lake can be a dangerous place. Some believe Jesus walked along the shoreline and in the surf; others that Jesus walked on the water. Whatever happened you need to be aware that in the storms of life Jesus is there and ready to be with you. What wonderful words to hear in the midst of a storm: ***'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'***

The disciples are struggling, but then Jesus appears, and worry turns to terror. An encounter with the divine is rarely a comfortable experience, though it may bring comfort eventually. That is how it is in this case. Only when Jesus speaks does the terror abate. As in the other story of a storm on the lake (Matt. 8.23-27), the reaction of the disciples to the whole event is one of awe. They end by acknowledging, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' This is an extraordinary statement, which only Matthew records. It should not be treated as an afterthought.

But what about Peter? Matthew's account is not just about Jesus walking on water, but about Peter doing so too. The temptation to read this as an account of yet another of Peter's failures is almost irresistible; but this is hardly fair to Peter. Should we really think the worse of a fellow Christian because he cannot manage to walk on water, or at least, not for very long? Speaking for myself, I cannot walk on water for very long either! Yet we can at times be critical of people who at least try.

I am reminded of a book, which I first read about 20 years ago, some of you may have come across it. The book is called 'If you want to walk on water you've got to get out of the boat.' The author writes, I believe there is something-someone-inside us who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more than merely avoiding failure. So, let me ask you a very important question: What's your boat?

Your boat is whatever represents safety and security to you apart from God himself. Your boat is whatever you are tempted to put your trust in, especially when life gets a little stormy. Your boat is whatever keeps you so comfortable that you don't want to give it up even if it's keeping you from joining Jesus on the waves. Your boat is whatever pulls you away from the high adventure of extreme discipleship.

Peter steps out of the boat and many would see that his sinking is a failure. However, at least he gave it a go. I see that it was the other 11 who stayed in the boat and didn't even try, who are the real failures.

Want to know what your boat is? Your fear will tell you. Just ask yourself this: What is it that most produces fear in you—especially when you think of leaving it behind and stepping out in faith? Amen

Prayers of intercession

Lord God, we come before you to pray for all those people for whom taking risks is a way of life.

Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.

We pray for our emergency services, health care workers, paramedics, the police, the fire service, all who daily face difficult situations as they seek to help to protect us and make our world a safer and more peaceful place.

Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.

We pray for people who work in troubled areas
– the armed forces in war zones,
those who bring humanitarian aid
into areas of natural disaster, and many more.

Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.

We pray for people who take risks in your name, Lord Jesus
– those who take your word where it is most needed
– and for people who grapple with faith and doubt.

Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

- 1 Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying: 'Christian, follow me.'
- 2 As of old apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

- 3 Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying : 'Christian, love me more.'
- 4 In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures :
'Christian, love me more than these.'
- 5 Jesus calls us ! By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895)

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Peter only knew life as a fisherman.
But he got out of the boat and followed you, Lord.
Help us to hear your voice,
get out of our boats and follow you.
In the week ahead, may the world and its problems decrease
as you increase in our lives.
Keep us focused on your way,
looking ahead and trusting you. **Amen.**

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and
with those you ought to love this day and for evermore. Amen

