

## Matthew 14:22-33 HT 09.8.20

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Today we leave the heady mountain tops of Romans 8 & 9 and return to Matthew's Gospel to join the disciples toward the end of what had been, even by their standards, an eventful day. It began tragically, with the news that Jesus' cousin and supporter, John the Baptist, had been murdered on Herod's instruction. Jesus went off by boat to try to take some time alone – but the local people wanted more miracles and walked round the shore to find him. (anyone who has ever suffered the death of someone they loved will know this experience of wanting the world to stop so you can grieve – but for everyone around you, the world carries on).

Instead of having his solitary time, Jesus spent the day ministering to the people who came to him – even feeding all 5,000 (plus women and children) with 5 loaves and two fish. By evening Jesus must have been desperate for his time alone for prayer and reflection so he dismissed the crowds and sent the disciples on ahead across the lake by boat.

The Sea of Galilee was notorious for sudden storms and that night the wind got up and blew against the disciples' boat. This was not like a previous storm where they had been frightened of drowning – This time the problem would have been exhaustion – the fourth watch was between 3.00 and 6.00 am in the morning and they had only managed about 1 ½ miles. They would have been absolutely exhausted when Jesus appeared walking on the water. To the first century mind the sea represented the place of evil spirits so the possibility of a ghost arising out of the misty waters would have been real.

Jesus calmed their fears by identifying himself.

To those weary disciples (who had perhaps almost given up that they would never reach the other side of the lake) Jesus appeared as a source of real hope. Just a short while ago Jesus had said *Matthew 11*<sup>28</sup> *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

Peter seems to have taken this literally and asks Jesus to call him to go to him: <sup>28</sup> “Lord, if it's you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

<sup>29</sup> “Come,” he said.

So, the exhausted Peter stepped out of the boat and started walking on the water towards Jesus. Everything was going well until he took his eyes off Jesus and looked round at the waves. *For those who are old enough to remember cartoons such as “Road Runner” you will have seen moments where the character runs off the edge of a cliff and continues running normally until he suddenly looks down and realizes there is nothing beneath him – at that moment he stops running and falls -* Peter's situation seems very similar as his mind seems to catch up with his actions. He had stepped out of the boat without thinking how impossible this was – suddenly he realized the size of the waves and the impossibility of what he was doing and panicked – Jesus reached out, saved him, they both got on the boat and the wind stopped.

It is the disciples response of worshipping Jesus as the Son of God that Matthew seems to want to point us to. At the beginning of the Gospel, at the Baptism of Jesus, God had declared Jesus as his Son. At the end, it is the Centurion who declares that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Here the disciples realise that without Jesus they can do nothing – but with him, because he is the Son of God they can do the impossible.

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So what can we take from this passage today:

1. Like Peter we will find ourselves in situations that are overwhelming. When we take our eyes off Jesus and concentrate on the problem then we sink - but Jesus still reaches out to us. If, like the disciples we acknowledge that Jesus truly is the Son of God who overcomes all things, then we too can hear his words to us: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."
2. Although there are many times when following Jesus will be rich and fulfilling there will be times when living for him will seem like hard work. For many of us the head wind today is the restrictions caused by the battle against Covid. It may be that we feel we are battling away on our own and need to see that Jesus is crossing the sea to come into our boat.
3. Peter remembered that Jesus said *Matthew 11* <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. And taking him at his word - came to Jesus. and the wind died down. The rest that Jesus offers isn't sitting down in the comfy chair with slippers and TV. The rest he offers is one of sharing the task, strength to carry on and a renewed sense of purpose. Peter found that paradoxically coming to Jesus didn't mean going to where he was – but inviting him into the boat with them (That was when the wind died down and they were able to row to shore) Coming to Jesus means inviting him, by his Holy Spirit to come into our lives and to be the source of strength and companionship we need to follow him.

I am going to close by reading some of the words of Isaiah – written many years before Jesus – yet fulfilled in him – and still being fulfilled in us today:

Isaiah 40 <sup>28</sup> Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no-one can fathom.

<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.