

Worship for Sunday 9th August

Welcome

A very warm welcome to worship on this Sunday at a time of year when, under normal circumstances, many would be away on holiday or visiting family. But these are not normal circumstances and although restrictions are easing slowly things are not as they were and some are still finding this time difficult.

Our gospel reading today tells of a time when the disciples found things difficult and our reflection, which is based on words by Jane Williams in her book of lectionary reflections reminds us that our hope and strength is to be found in God, not because we deserve it, but because of his grace and love for us.

And so now let us now Praise the King of Heaven.

Hymn

Praise my soul the king of heaven

Prayer

God of the earth and the waves, we praise you that you more than meet all our needs. You call us out from our security to experience your adventures and blessings. You don't want us to be like a becalmed ship, or stuck in the harbour. You want us out in deep water and you'll be with us.
We praise you, Lord.

Lord God,

We're sorry for the times we take our eyes off you and seek to do things in our own strength. We're sorry for the times we doubt that you can keep us on the straight and narrow. We're sorry for the times we ask you for signs.

Lord, we pray that you will forgive our doubts and hesitations, show us your loving presence, especially when we most need it, and teach us to trust you at all times.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

Reflection

Is there something about us that is deeply resistant to God's grace? It's not that we don't believe in him, or wish to follow him, neither do we consciously reject him, but we simply can't help believing that all of this is because of something we do,



something we have to achieve with our own efforts. We act as though God is far away and a hard taskmaster, who has to be won over by our hard attempts to read his mind and so please him. In Romans 5 Paul makes a direct comparison between the law and justification by faith. The law he says is about doing things but faith on the other hand is an acceptance of what God has done, in sending Jesus and raising him from the dead. All of that was done without any effort on our part and all we have to do in response is to recognise it as the activity of God.

Peter, however, shows how hard it is to believe that. In our gospel reading today Jesus is trying to find a little time and space for himself, to pray and reflect and prepare himself for the confrontations to come. Finally, after feeding the 5000, he persuades the disciples to go off in the boat and leave him alone. What do you think the conversation was like in the boat? They must have been very excited by the miracle they had just been part of and full of enthusiasm and hope. But then the storm begins to get up and they are hanging around waiting for Jesus; they must have begun to lose heart.

Typically, it is Peter whose enthusiasm return immediately. As soon as he sees Jesus, he wants another dose of the high excitement of miracles and so Jesus indulges him. But out on the unstable water, with the wind even stronger without the protection of the boat, Peter panics. He had thought the miracles were a kind of magic, that would make the waves like a road and build a shield around him to keep the wind off. He had thought of Jesus's powers as some sort of external force, to be tapped into and used as he pleased. He had not realised that Jesus's power is not magic but the absolute demonstration of nature responding to her maker. Peter had set out to do exactly what Paul was talking about – to try and get close to God's power by sheer force of will. Instead, he has to reach out his hand to Jesus and recognise that he walks on the water as a disciple of Jesus, not by any other kind of power at all. So the disciples' response is at last the right one. "You are the Son of God" they say to Jesus, as their boat rocks calmly on the friendly sea.

Our faith is not a system, which some people can use easily and some can't, and each person can only reap the rewards accordingly. Our faith is a relationship, offered by God, in which our place is opened up by Jesus and in which we are constantly tutored and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. No one is 'good' at it, but that's all right, because entrance is not by exam and places are not limited.

We do not need to be tempted to go off looking for challenges to prove our worth to God. God knows our worth and loves us despite that. At this time when maybe we still feel a little alone although the restrictions are lifting we would do well to remember that. God loves us!

Song You are mine (David Haas)

I will come to you in the silence
I will lift you from all your fear
You will hear My voice
I claim you as My choice
Be still, and know I am near

I am hope for all who are hopeless
I am eyes for all who long to see
In the shadows of the night,
I will be your light
Come and rest in Me

Do not be afraid, I am with you
I have called you each by name
Come and follow Me
I will bring you home
I love you and you are mine

I am strength for all the despairing
Healing for the ones who dwell in shame
All the blind will see, the lame will all run free
And all will know My name

Do not be afraid, I am with you
I have called you each by name
Come and follow Me
I will bring you home
I love you and you are mine

I am the Word that leads all to freedom
I am the peace the world cannot give
I will call your name, embracing all your pain
Stand up, now, walk, and live

Do not be afraid, I am with you
I have called you each by name
Come and follow Me

I will bring you home
I love you and you are mine

Prayers

We pray for those who find themselves tossed about by all that life throws at them, those who feel out of control and don't know which way to turn...

We pray for those who find themselves with an unexpected challenge, those who have much asked of them and feel overwhelmed...

We pray for those who find themselves overtaken by events, those who feel dejected and at a loss...

We pray for those who find themselves on the wrong side of popularity, those who feel they have more enemies than friends...

We pray for those who find themselves searching for what they do not know, those who feel that there must be more to life...

We pray for confused disciples and perplexed prophets, those who strive to be faithful and serve you, only to be surprised by grace...

Amen

Lord, you taught us to pray.....**Our Father**

Hymn Will your anchor hold?

Blessing

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