

Let's pray: Lord we thank you for all that you have done to help us and guide us – forgive us when we falter and fill us with your Spirit so that we can draw closer to you. Amen

This week I have changed the reading because I wanted to think about what it means in our lives right now to have faith – faith that will carry us through this awful situation we are in.

The reading from Matthews gospel tells us about Peters faith and what Jesus says to him when it falters! We could all do with hearing Jesus right now telling us not to be afraid and so I hope as you hear or read this you will hear his voice and know that he is right there with you and you need not be afraid!

I know that it is easy for me to say and that many of you will be afraid because of the Coronavirus and yes we do need to have a healthy awareness of what it is doing and so take all the right precautions to keep safe but we also need to put our trust in Jesus and let him fill us with love and peace so that fear does not dis-able us!

We might not be able to do the things we would like to do but there are other things we can do. Our WhatsApp group has grown and the list for my email updates is growing too. People are finding new ways to keep in touch! I have read some of the books on my bookshelves that I never get time to read in normal circumstances and I have started to crochet and sew so that my time is put to good use. I am sure you have all found new ways to spend the hours shut up in the house too!!

The circumstances we are living with at the moment are not normal and in our reading from Matthews gospel the disciples found themselves in a situation that was definitely not normal!!

Being in a boat on the lake was not out of the ordinary but seeing someone coming towards you on the water ... now that is quite extra-ordinary!!

In the passage just before this one we hear how Jesus had fed the 5,000 and now he has sent the disciples on ahead and he takes some time on his own to pray. He has been trying to find some peace and quiet for days and now seemed like the perfect opportunity. And he must have prayed for some time because we are told he was alone in the evening but it was the fourth watch of the night – which is between 3 and 6am – before he goes out to meet the disciples. So he has prayed all night! In the meantime, the disciples are following Jesus's directions to go on ahead of him to the other side. But the boat was being buffeted by the waves because it was windy and so they are probably concentrating on keeping afloat when they see a figure coming towards them. Now I don't know about you but I think I might have been a bit frightened if I had seen what looked like a ghost coming towards me on the water so I quite understand the terror of the disciples.

But then Jesus speaks to them and says “Take courage, don't be afraid, it is I”. Now you would think that once they realised it was Jesus they would have felt calm and trusted that things were going to be okay – but I'm not sure that they did, because Peter says Lord **if** it is you tell me to come to you on the water and of course Jesus just simply says “come”.

And give him his due Peter then steps out of the boat and goes towards Jesus and he walks on water for a few steps.

It was a huge step of faith because remember it is very windy and so it was not the ideal conditions for trying something as daring as walking on water so we have to give Peter credit for at least making

that huge step. Peter trusted Jesus to be there to help him he knew that with Jesus anything was possible. And of course it was until he realised that he might drown in the waves and he took his eyes off Jesus at which point he began to sink. Thankfully he knew he only needed to ask and Jesus would help which of course he does.

This story is a story of faith and what we can do if only we trust in Jesus but it is also a story that shows us what we will miss out on if we don't take that step of faith and reach out to Jesus and trust him.

When we look at the other 11 disciples we see a group of men who just didn't have the nerve or the trust to step out of the boat. We can see why – that's not difficult but it does mean they missed out on so much. Even though Jesus assured them that he was not a ghost, they were still afraid. And remember it was dark, and they were in the midst of a storm so it is not surprising that they were too frightened to get out of the boat. Peter may well have been afraid too but he trusted Jesus enough to step out and he would always be able to say "look what I achieved" whilst the others would always say "if only".

The second reason the 11 didn't get out of the boat may have been because they had doubts. After all no man has ever walked on water so why should they believe that Jesus could. Of course what they had forgotten was that Jesus was the Son of God who can do all things, including walking on water. Peter didn't have any doubts and he did something amazing and the others missed out on that.

And perhaps the third reason why the other 11 disciples did not get out of the boat was because they felt safe in the boat – it may have been tossed about a bit in the wind but at least it was afloat and if they got out then they would surely sink. So the other 11 disciples did not get out of the boat because they were afraid, they had doubts, and they felt safe in the boat.

How many of us use the same reasoning when we don't want to do something. How many of us like to stay in the boat – in our comfort zone because at least it is familiar to us and we feel safe in it. How many of us trust Jesus but only if he doesn't ask us to do something outside our comfort zone. How many of us will look back and say “if only” instead of “look what I achieved!”

I wanted to use that reading and this sermon which I wrote about 3 years ago because we can relate it so well to our present situation. We are in a storm and we need to have faith that Jesus is there with us and he will help us if we ask. Some of us feel that we are walking on water but we get a little anxious that we are going to stay afloat! We have to keep our eyes on Jesus and not be afraid. “Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid” that is what he tells us and now more than ever we need to hear that message and have confidence in him who created us and he who gave his life for us. He will not fail us!!

So as you sit at home today and wonder and perhaps worry about the future – stop – fix your eyes on Jesus and give thanks for all the good things in your life. You may not be able to see your family but give thanks that they are part of your life and they are safe. You may not be able to go to the group or club you are a part of but give thanks that they will be thinking about you as you are thinking about them. You may not be able to go to work but give thanks for your home and all the things around you. There are so many things to be thankful for let's not let the situation make us feel afraid!

Do not be afraid and fix your eyes firmly on Jesus and ask him to help us – and be confident that he will!!

Amen