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*“Don’t be afraid!*

*I AM is here!”*



**25 April, 2021**

## **Botley Baptist Church**

*a family which nurtures*

*believing and becoming*

*and rejoices in belonging!*

Another week of COVID surging ahead claiming lives in some regions of the world, and mercifully ebbing, receding and subsiding in other areas of the world. Not because anyone **deserves** the former, or thinks they are **fortunate** to receive the latter

The Angel of Death shows no mercy as vast clouds of acrid smoke rise from mass cremations of loved and dear ones.

Many don't know, there is a door that leads from death into eternal life; for them, life is an exercise in futility.

Miracles are happening all around us ushering people to fruitful living.

*“There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ('man's search for God!') suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing He had found us?”*

— C.S. Lewis, Miracles

Join us today on a brief journey through an oft overlooked miracle.

Welcome to worship!

**PLEASE CLICK ON TEXT IN RED TO JOIN SINGING ON YOUTUBE.  
WHEN FINISHED  
CLICK THE BROWSER'S BACK BUTTON TO RETURN HERE**

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**LISTEN to words of this contemplative Hymn by St Louis Jesuits.  
Focus and Centre your Thoughts on Jesus  
whom we have gathered to worship**

### **PRAYER**

O God our Father, who is infinitely greater than all powerful forces in this world,  
still our anxious minds and fluttering hearts, to know You are God.

O Lord our Master, who speaks out of the whirlwind of everyday life,  
breathe in us Your Holy Spirit to strengthen, comfort,  
and guide us through the storms of life.

O Holy Spirit, Yours is the still, small voice trying to grab our attention,  
speak to us this hour that we might be conveyors and carriers of Your peace  
in our homes, to our communities, and into our world.

We pray all this in the name of the One who calmed the raging sea. **AMEN.**

**HYMN I the Lord of Sea and Sky, I have Heard my People Cry**

### **PRAYER for OUR WORLD**

Let all faithful people give thanks and praise God's Holy Name.

I praise you, O God my Lord, for you have lifted me up and robed me in  
Your glory. Your Son, my Christ has heard my confession and forgiven me.

I delight in being restored into Your fellowship, but Master the world  
around us is hurting and grieving, unable to see you through its pain,  
blinded by its own tears.

God of healing and wholeness, we come with thanksgiving in our hearts  
for all the evidence of Your love, Your goodness and Your mercy found in  
stories of old, and also in lives today.

Lives bruised with tragedy find consolation when touched by your gracious Spirit;

Lives scarred with suffering and rejection have hope renewed through the power of the living Christ.

We praise and adore you for hearts changed and lives transformed by your grace and mercy and we pray we might imitate your acts of great kindness in some small way, only to reflect your generosity.

Arouse in us we pray, a love like yours so that we reach out to this wounded and troubled world with the compassion of Christ, proclaiming the gospel with integrity to friends and strangers alike.

Your anger, O God, lasts but a moment, while your graciousness lasts a lifetime. Weeping lingers for a night, but joy comes with the morning.

May our praise never be silenced as we give thanks and praise God for ever and ever, praying as we always do, in Jesus' name. **AMEN.**

## **HYMN     I have a Friend in Jesus**

## **READING     John 6:16-21**

## **MESSAGE**

Last Sunday we were in awe of Jesus who was offered a poor family's supper of 5 small barley cakes and 2 kippers of fish being carried home by a small boy. He gave thanks to God for providing the food, broke the bread and fish into portions, gave the Disciples to hand them out to 5,000 men to feed themselves and women and children in their company on the hillside! When everyone had eaten their fill, Jesus asked the disciples to collect the leftover "portions" scattered across the hillside. They had heard Philip question Jesus how many months' salary would be needed to pay for food needed to feed the crowd (v.5), they had heard Andrew wonder how 5 loaves and 2 fish would feed the vast crowd, they now filled 12 baskets-full of "portions", each disciple lugging one basket full, the memory of which would be seared in their minds, forever!

When people realised what Jesus had done, they wanted to make Him king, but he slipped away to be alone with His Father. Our human tendency is to rally

around persons who will meet our basic needs - food, clothing and shelter. All over the world, during national or regional elections, people vote for candidates who promise to provide them the basics of food and shelter, a promise easily and readily broken; but Jesus reminds us, *Look at the birds who neither plant nor harvest and do not store food in barns, but your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't YOU more valuable to Him than they are?* <sup>1</sup>

John says, *The crowds were ready to force Jesus to be their King! (to be their "Bread of Heaven! Feed me till I want no more!"* <sup>2</sup>) The crowds wanted to reduce Jesus to an earthly Prince, a world ruler who would make life easier for them by overthrowing the Romans and getting rid of Herod! If only they knew, they were in the presence of the Son of God Himself!

One of the lessons we learn from Jesus is the way He shuns publicity. As soon as people rally around Him, He makes Himself scarce, and goes to spend time with His Father! He is very clear about His mission - He is **not** here to build a following for Himself; He is among us to open the way into the Father's presence, and the **ONLY** way is through Him, the Son!

Before we close this section and move on, it is worth noting that Jesus is not turned on by excited crowds who want to enthrone Him as King of their patch. Jesus is excited and energised by our enthusiasm to follow Him into the presence of the Father.

While Jesus spent time with His Father, the Disciples were looking for Him. Finally they decided to wait by the shore; Jesus would know "*where they parked the car*"(!) and surely he could find His way back there! The sun set, darkness fell, and the Disciples decided to get in the boat and head back home to Capernaum. Surely Jesus will find his way back to their home.

A little appreciation of geography helps understand what happened.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:26

<sup>2</sup> from the Hymn: "Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah" by William Williams, published 1745, translated by Peter Williams, published 1771.

The Sea of Galilee was and is well known for its sudden, violent wind storms that quickly transforms the lake into a dangerous place. It lies six hundred feet below sea level, in a cup-like depression among the hills. When the sun sets, the hot air rises, and cooler air from the west rushes down over the hillside, resulting in wind-churns across the lake.

As they rowed towards Capernaum, *a gale swept down and made the sea very rough.* 6 - 8 hours later, they travelled only 3-4 miles, rowing **against** the wind, **against** the rising waves cresting and crashing onto their boat, resisting their forward movement. Rowing into the wind, they made little progress.

Reminds us of times in our lives when we want to move ahead, but are buffeted by strong, gale-force winds, progress seems very slow, and frustration builds - *I was with Jesus on the hillside; my faith in Him was energised watching Him perform an incredible miracle. I waited for Him, to spend time with Him, but He did not show up. Perhaps He has more important things to take care of. So I decided to go ahead and then this fierce storm engulfed me and slowed my progress, making it very frustrating for me to make any progress. But I beaver on and continue to row towards my goal!*

Matthew tells us this happened in the fourth watch of the night, which is between three and six in the morning (14:25). In the light before the break of dawn, they saw Jesus walking on the water towards them and were frightened.

The last time they saw Jesus, He was behind them in the east, and now He is walking on the water (through the storm) towards them from the west, **from Capernaum** where they were headed!

Fright is a natural reaction when we see the unexpected and experience the impossible. Jesus coming from the direction of Capernaum was unexpected, and to see Him walking on the water towards them was, in their frame of reference, impossible.

The Disciples' response to seeing Jesus **and** hearing His comforting words of assurance, *Do not be afraid! I AM<sup>3</sup> is here!*, was to offer Him an eager helping hand and get Him on board.

Too often, we misunderstand our response when Jesus is standing by to help. We think, *He knows the trouble I am in, He knows my struggle - He will jump in and help me.* But Jesus waits, walking on the water towards us, showing us that He is Master over all creation, waiting for us to realise our weakness, our inability to do anything in the storm, about the powerful force working against us. When we recognise our weakness, our frustration at not making any progress against the powerful storm, we reach out **willingly** to receive Jesus into our situation.

One could say that Jesus rescued His disciples from frustration and futility. Jesus wants us to work hard; but He never wants us to work in futility. Their work had not been a waste, but it needed the touch of Divine power and the presence of Divine authority.

And that's when miracles happen! Very few translations end this section with an exclamation mark, and I think this section needs to end with several exclamation marks! You see, the astonishing miracle of feeding 5,000 men plus women and children ending with each disciple collecting one full to overflowing basket of leftover portions from the hillside, is not as powerful as a miracle when you are instantly released of the thing you have been struggling with all your might. The Disciples on their boat, eagerly and willingly invited Jesus on board, **and IMMEDIATELY they arrived at their destination.**<sup>4</sup>

Each Disciple personally experienced this REAL miracle. Having struggled against the storm to get to Capernaum, when they let Jesus into their situation to take control, **immediately they arrived at their destination!**

If you are in the midst of a storm, physical, emotional, financial, whatever, Jesus is walking through the storm towards you. Do not be afraid to admit defeat in

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3:14

<sup>4</sup> John 6:21

using your own strength, your own resources, and reach out eagerly to let Jesus into your situation. I cannot guarantee what **immediately** will look like in your situation, but be assured of this: you will cease struggling, and you will find yourself in a much better place than what you had planned.

Don't delay! There is a way out of the storm you are in, and you are looking at Him who will land you at your destination, safely! **AMEN.**

## **PRAYER**

God of Wonder and Glory! Our world, the one You made for us, is awesome. You created it and You continue to hold it together, even as our every action threatens to tear it apart.

God of grace and mercy, the love you have shown us in Jesus is more than we deserve. As He walks towards us through the storm we are going through, may we welcome Him wholeheartedly, receive Him eagerly, and let Him restore us into deeper fellowship with You.

We thirst for Living Water. Land us on the shore where shall bask in the streams of Your wonder and glory, Your justice and righteousness, Your grace and mercy, drink this nourishing Water and be satisfied, refreshed and renewed for continuing journey with Jesus. In the Name of Him who is our Companion for life and life in eternity, Jesus our Christ. **AMEN.**

This we pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit....

**HYMN    With Jesus in the Boat, ..... we go Sailing Home**

## **BENEDICTION**

Filled to the brim with the goodness of God, the unending Companionship of Jesus the Christ, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, go now in peace to serve God in all that you think, do and say.

Now may the grace of our Saviour, the love of our Creator, and the friendship of our Enabler, be with you, this day and every day! **AMEN.**

**CLOSING MUSIC   Click here and listen while you make coffee/tea**