

Playing Safe?

[Romans 10: 5-15.](#) [Matthew 14: 22-33.](#)

How do you imagine the Sea of Galilee? The hymn ‘Dear Lord and Father of Mankind’ depicts it as a place of peace and silence, with the “calm of hills above.” Holiday pictures often show boats fishing in the depths of the lake, the water mirroring the sunlight.

Jesus sends his disciples out in a boat on the lake and takes time to walk and pray in the mountains alone, a retreat from the emotional strain of the news of his cousin John’s brutal execution and the clamour of feeding over five thousand souls. Many of the disciples are experienced fishermen; they should be in familiar territory whilst their Master takes some time to be alone.

The Sea of Galilee is not a peaceful body of water, however. Even with our modern technology allied to generations of navigation skills, it is a most inhospitable place at times. I was supposed to be going out on a boat trip there whilst visiting the Holy Land just over a year ago, but our journey had to be called off for the day because the coastguard ruled that all vessels had to stay in harbour, as the weather was so bad that to venture out would be hazardous.



The clouds gathered over the water in thick grey banks of fog. It wasn’t just the lack of visibility that made the situation so dangerous, though. The water slapped menacingly against the shore, whipped by angry winds. You could only imagine how bad it would be further out in the darkness. This wasn’t a place of calm, or safety.

The disciples were in danger on the Sea of Galilee, with no coastguard to look after them. They were too far out to return to land, and were being pounded by the waves and the wind. It would be a very long night.

Somewhere in the very wee small hours of the morning – somewhere between three and six o’clock – the disciples’ journey across the lake went from being unpleasant to terrifying. Were they dreaming? Was this a ghost? There was the form of Jesus, who they had last seen going up a mountain on the opposite side of the lake, walking out of the waves and gloom towards them.

Jesus says, “Take courage! It is I! Don’t be afraid.”

The winds and waves do not abate. For all Jesus’ words, the storm rages on.

Peter decides to ask Jesus to invite him out on the water with him. Jesus responds with just one word: "Come."

What would you say to Peter if you were with him at that point?

Where is he safest? In the boat with the other eleven disciples? The water of the sea is a dangerous element. The stormy wind roars in Peter's ears. Humans are not supposed to walk on water. There are laws of physics which dictate this. Yet, where is Peter safest if it is not on the water?

It is only when Peter is fully focused on Jesus' invitation to come to him rather than the noise of the storm that he is truly safe.

There are many times when we are in situations where life is full of storms which deafen us and threaten to cause us real harm, testing our faith every bit as much as when the disciples were all at sea on the Sea of Galilee. We are all currently experiencing untold traumas through the impact of the coronavirus. There are all kinds of stresses and strains around us, physical, mental and spiritual.

It can be tempting to try to weather such storms on our own, to be self-reliant, staying in our own little boat, under our own jury rig until things calm down. The question is the same for us as it was for Peter: where are we safest?

Please do not be encouraged to try walking on water yourself as a test of faith. But perhaps in those moments when the storms appear to threaten to engulf us, we should remember that they are when we need to keep our focus on Jesus. He calls us step by step, and he does not let us down. Even when our faith wobbles, he catches us.

But we have to step out in faith in order to be caught. We can't "play safe", decide that we are OK just as we are, on our own. As we take that step of faith and share Holy Communion together, we catch a glimpse of Jesus reaching to us, to catch us and rescue us.

The Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Gracious Father,
revive your Church in our day,
and make her holy, strong and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev'd Vicky Barrett