

This week Michelle Obama spoke honestly about her low-grade depression fuelled by a combination of the impact of Covid-19, ongoing racial injustice & the state of government in the US. She used the word ‘dispiriting’ to describe the current environment. *‘These are not fulfilling times, spiritually.’* I don’t think that she is talking about her prayer life there, rather the state of the interactions within communities and nations that nourish the soul and common good or not. Theologically, human beings flourish when relationships work at all levels. Many of us might be able to relate to her observation. The pandemic is about our health. It is an existential threat and because of it we have to relate to each other in un-natural ways at the moment. Racial injustice is about the undermining of human identity and value. Lack of trust in government is disabling – consider voices from Beirut this week. These things gnaw away at your soul because at every level koinonia or good relationships are compromised. In today’s Gospel reading one translation describes the disciples’ boat as being harassed by the waves. In storm of 21st century life we are indeed harassed.

And our Gospel story is all about doing faith when you are harassed. Here is Peter, a fisherman on the sea that he knows all too well, working hard to manage the boat in a storm. And then Jesus appears and says to Peter **'Come'**. In the harassment comes an outrageous invitation. Leave the security of your boat & go where you will feel completely at sea. Trust me for this. Jesus asks Peter to step out beyond his known securities at the very moment when he is harassed, to trust the command of Jesus & see what **'reservoir of divine resource'** opens up. It's the 'get out of the boat moment.' These invitations come in different ways to all of us & they have that common theme of knowing the call of Jesus to step into the unfamiliar as well as the voice of assurance, **Take heart, it is I: do not be afraid**. Unfurl yourself into a new beginning as John O'Donohue put it.

Peter starts well but then loses his nerve. Caught between faith & doubt & undermined by fear. Recognise the territory? Happens quite a bit in Peter's life. Courage and fear close together – I will follow > denial. It is the way he is wired.

Faith is nurtured through courage but also the experience of failure. Nothing is wasted in God's economy.

And then Jesus' key question, **You of little faith, why did you doubt?** Their faith is neither perfect nor absent, it is little... a phrase of Jesus that turns up on a number of occasions in Matthew. Clearly, the invitation is to grow or stretch that 'little' faith. According to this passage faith grows by expanding your vision of who Jesus is. Psalm 107 sits in the background to this passage. It speaks of Yahweh as the deliverer, the saviour, the one who satisfies and stills the storm by command. Job speaks of Yahweh as the one who tramples the waves of the Sea (in Hebrew thought the unruly sea symbolised power of evil). When Jesus says **It is I; do not be afraid** it echoes Isaiah's language of the divine name. So, the passage drips with claims of divinity and this is where disciples end up. Echoing the centurion at the Cross we hear **Truly you are the Son of God**. How has our understanding of Jesus grown over the years? Who is he for us now? When did we last speak out who Jesus is for us?

These are strange harassing times. Make the soul ache. But these are also an opportunity to nurture our trust in Jesus, or as has been observed, faith will get smaller **like a song that disappears when we stop singing**. Now I know we cannot sing together but wherever you are right now recognise the song of the Spirit within you. It is a song about the risen Jesus who brings newness to a tired, bruised and hurting world. **It is I; do not be afraid**