

Getting out of the boat.

Matthew 14

Jesus Walks on the Water

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹ "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Of all the things Jesus did in his three years of public ministry, it's hardly surprising that this event was one that was remembered.

As real events go it lends itself to encouragement in present troubled circumstances.

Matthew the Jewish writer to a Jewish audience is tapping into a shared perception of water.

In Jewish thought, water is chaos, its power is evil. Water, Seas and Rivers are danger; the mystical deeps, the power of destruction. But the OT shows God's power. Noah being saved in the flood, Moses crossing the Red Sea, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha stopping the flow of the Jordan.

And here is Jesus trampling on the waves, he walks on the water, the Messiah has authority over chaos and evil.

But Jesus isn't showing off, he is coming to their aid. We can see why it is a popular story. For 'boat' think 'church' or 'family' or 'workplace' or 'school'. When we find ourselves in trouble and call on his name we can be sure Jesus is heading our way.

His help might be in ways unexpected. There's another story of a boat and a storm – Luke has that story in his gospel. Jesus is asleep, but on waking calms the storm. You can see the lesson from that story. Jesus is with you, just call on his name.

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In this story Jesus is absent (which theologically we know can't be the case, God is with us always) but God can seem absent from our troubles. This story tells us that Jesus is coming to us, but it might be in unexpected ways. After all – who walks on water?

He comes to our aid in unexpected ways.

The disciples in the boat are afraid. Afraid of the storm and then afraid of the ghost on the water. Jesus calls out "Take courage. It is I, don't be afraid". I haven't time to go into Jesus using God's name "I am" let's just note in passing that Jewish Matthew is telling Jewish readers the name Jesus is using. I am.

Peter wants to be sure and there seems only one way to test it out. He's got to get out of the boat.

The story shows us Peter caught midway between faith and doubt. Is this you? Is this possible? Should I? Shouldn't I? He takes a few steps and then the reality of the storm and the disbelief he's actually doing it sink in (yes pun intended!!) and he starts to sink and cries out 'Lord save me'.

Another lesson. For all who dare to believe his grace is sufficient for our need. His power is made perfect in our weakness. To believe is to risk, the risk-taking of faith. He will not let us sink beneath the waves.

By the time this was written Peter is the Premier Apostle and doing mighty deeds of his own. This story shows us his faith journey and gives us hope. The greatest saints have doubts and failures in their track record.

Today is our annual meeting and I'll be reporting on progress concerning Transforming Trinity. This project is our opportunity to

step out of the boat. In her contribution on the back of the TT booklet Bishop Olivia said.

Friends, the times we have been through have been extraordinarily demanding on all of us. The vision of Transforming Trinity asks that we not only survive them, but that we defy them and emerge with a strong sense of what we need to thrive and grow as this decade unfolds before us.

It's going to be a challenge and what's required is faith.

At an ecumenical conference of church leaders Ernest Campbell, pastor of Riverside church in New York said,

The reason that we seem to lack faith in our time, is that we are not doing anything that requires it.

Like Peter, we have to be willing to step out from the relative safety and security of the boat into the troubled water of the world to proclaim the love, mercy and justice of God found in Jesus Christ.

What we are not called to do is put God to the test in a reckless way. In Lent we recall the story of Jesus being tempted to prove God's love by throwing himself off the temple. His reply was simple *do not put the Lord your God to the test* (Deuteronomy 6:16).

In the context of Transforming Trinity that means we aren't going to embark on something we can't pay for, or we only have a vague idea of how new facilities might be used.

I wonder how often St. Peter remembered this event? When going to visit Gentiles to eat and stay with them? When speaking to the Sanhedrin Authorities? When they pleaded with him to heal

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Tabitha (who had died)? I wonder if he felt the ground shift beneath his feet; I wonder if he got a sinking feeling?

Or did he remember the strength and presence of Jesus hauling him up and teasing him – you and your tiny faith!!

Our last lesson comes direct from Matthew again. He makes sure we know that before this event Jesus was praying...if you want to walk on water – if you're going to get out the boat. PRAY FIRST!

Lord God our heavenly Father, we want to get out of the boat.

Call us out onto the water,

It doesn't take any faith to carry on as we are and do nothing.

Grant us we pray the faith for the next step and then the one after that.

Let our faith tell of your saving grace and our lives be to your glory.

We ask this in Jesus name.

Amen.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 3/4/22