

Sunday 9th August 2020  
A Sermon by the Rev James W. Aitchison  
Based on a Reading from the Lectionary

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Opening Prayers

Son of God, you walk on the waters of turmoil  
to meet us in the midst of our lives.  
Help us to recognize your presence,  
remember your promise,  
rely on your power, and receive your peace  
through every storm. Amen.

A Reading from Holy Scripture:

Matthew 14:22-33.      Jesus walks on water

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

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

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. don't be afraid."

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

<sup>29</sup> "Come," he said.

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

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

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

*New International Version - UK (NIVUK)*

## Sermon

Today's reading begins with a sense of urgency, 'Immediately Jesus made the Disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side of the lake. Alone Jesus then dismisses the vast crowd that had just experienced a miracle. Why does Jesus not get the Disciples to disperse the crowd?

A clue might be found in John's Gospel chapter 6 where we are told that after the people saw the miracle Jesus had done they said, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

The people were thinking of Jesus as the Prophet or Messianic figure from Deuteronomy 18:15. When Moses tells the people, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brethren – him you shall heed."

Jesus knew that they were about to try and make him king by force and the Roman authorities would have treated this as a revolt.

The people had misunderstood the nature of Jesus' sovereignty and Kingdom.

It seems then that Jesus did not want His Disciples getting caught up in this way of thinking and so sends them off and dismisses the people before they get the chance to do anything rash and 'rebellious.'

After everyone has gone, Jesus withdraws to a high place where He can be alone and commune with His Father in peace. Jesus often went to a place where he could find solitude.

After the demands of so many people and such a remarkable display of power, Jesus needs to spend time with His Father.

Prayer is required not only in times of distress, hardships or defeats, but in times of ease and victory, (perhaps it is needed more in times of ease and victory for at such times it is very easy to become proud and forgetful of God).

Perhaps we should note here that solitude is not the same as loneliness. Though every other person had gone and Jesus was alone on the mountainside, He did not feel lonely, He was with His Father and would have been able to concentrate on and enjoy His presence. This would have given Jesus a sense of peace and contentment.

Loneliness however is very different, this is when a person has no sense of or takes no joy or comfort from the presence of another, not even God's. Loneliness eats away at the soul; it envelops a person and crushes their spirit. Loneliness and its effects can be felt even when in the company of others.

My friends, if you feel like this now, take heart, because there were times when even Jesus felt the deep pain of loneliness. The ultimate sense of loneliness came for Him (and the world) upon the Cross-, evidenced in His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus has felt loneliness more keenly and painfully than any other, yet He triumphed over it and has made it possible for all of us to know and experience God's presence: to have a conviction and even an awareness that our Heavenly Father is with us and that He will never leave us or forsake us.

What Jesus prayed at this time is not recorded, how could it be He was alone with His Father, this was too holy for us to be privy to, but what we do see from this is the importance that Jesus placed upon time with His Father in prayer. If Jesus valued these things so highly, then surely we too must value prayer and quality time with God?

Jesus prayed for some time because it was between 3am and 6am that He went out to His disciples, who were still in the boat and by this time struggling against dangerous high winds and waves. We are told Jesus walks toward them. Yes a simple statement, 'walks toward them', but Jesus is walking on the water.

The Greek words can be read in such a way to suggest that Jesus skirted around the shore of the lake, but this does not adequately explain either the reaction of the Disciples or how Jesus managed to get to the boat that as it floated on the water.

Like all of Jesus's miracles this too has been disputed, called a myth or explained away as the result of some natural phenomenon.

Nowhere in the Gospels do the writers attempt to explain how Jesus performed a miracle, rather the writers simply describe what Jesus did, the result of His actions, the reaction of those who were the recipients and the reactions of the onlookers.

'Jesus walked toward them,' and the clear implication is, yes, on the water.

No detailed description of how this was done, no scientific explanation is attempted. So how is our modern, scientific generation to understand the miracles of Jesus, including this one of walking on water?

Well there is no 'scientific proof' to convince us of the possibility of such miracles, there is no proof that anyone can walk on water.

Those things that Jesus did which have commonly been called miracles are accepted as such by the Christian, through faith.

'Ah you intellectual halfwits!' Is the response from those who cannot believe in miracles?

Last Sunday it was posited that without a belief in miracles there would be no Christian Faith. Without miracles we who call ourselves Christians would be a very pitiable and pathetic people (some think us so regardless).

The Whole of the Christian Faith is founded upon miracles, those sensible, observable, interventions of God into everyday life and events.

Without the Virgin conception and birth, the deity of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection, the Ascension and all the miracles that Jesus did, there would be no Christianity; it would all be a cruel hoax.

Way back in the midst of time, long before Matthew wrote his Gospel, Job says of God, 'He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea' (Job 9:8). The ability to do these things belongs to God alone.

As for Jesus walking on the water, if this were not so how else could we explain the terror the Disciples felt when they saw a figure walking in the last place they would expect. No doubt they reasoned, 'only spirits can walk on water,' and in the middle of a tremendous storm they assumed that it was a malevolent spirit.

As Jesus approaches them, He knows they are afraid and says to them, 'Take courage! It is I, don't be afraid.'

We can tease out all sorts of meanings and even allegories from this passage of Scripture, but let us consider one only, and obvious and simple one.

That when we are struggling against the wind and waves, or as Shakespeare would have it in Hamlet, 'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune-.' And when we are afraid, even with the roar of eh wind and waves, when Jesus speaks, we will hear His voice saying, 'Take courage, it is I, have no fear.'

Someone once wrote, 'Fear knocked at the door, Faith answered; there was no one there.'

It is easy to say to one another, 'Don't be afraid,' but something is needed to give courage in the midst of fear, for the Disciples and for all Christians that is the very presence of Jesus the Christ.

When Peter realised that this apparition on the water was actually Jesus and not a malevolent spirit, or sea monster, his fear vanished and asked Jesus to call Him, obviously believing that only if Jesus called him would he be enabled to go to Him (on the water). When Jesus does call him, Peter steps out of the boat and on to the water and to his utter amazement and presumably the amazement of the Disciples he does not sink but begins to walk on the water toward Jesus. Wow! What an experience, he must have felt ecstatic and as long as he looked at Jesus and walked toward Him, he was doing fine, but when he saw the wind he became afraid again and he began to sink.

Matthew writes:

'But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"'

Take our eyes of Jesus and we will begin to sink, there can be no doubt about this.

Jesus admonishes Peter for his little faith and asks why he doubted; he could see Jesus in front of him and had heard His voice. Now only Jesus could admonish Peter for doubting, let us not dare to criticise him, as if our faith were stronger and more certain, have any of us been able to walk even one step on water?

When Jesus got into the boat with Peter and the other Disciples the wind died down, it had served its purpose, it had brought the Disciples a stage further in their understanding of who Jesus was (is) and it had taught them more about the importance of trusting Him and had served to strengthen their faith.

This incident teaches us that no matter what way or how hard the wind may blow, no matter how high or choppy the waves may be, whatever the storm, if we keep our gaze upon Jesus and our ears open to His voice, He will bring us into the safety of His presence and quell the storm around us, and even within us.

Amen!

## Prayers Of Intercession

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

God of favour and purpose,  
You have clothed us with the righteousness  
of your Son Jesus Christ.  
You have been with us throughout our life.  
You are with us in our deepest pain,  
fear, and bewilderment.

You hear our cry when others turn  
a deaf ear and have a hard heart.  
You lift us from the depths of discouragement  
and walk with us over the troubled waters of life.

We come to you now with confidence  
on behalf of the church, the world,  
and all in need:  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For the family of God, our sisters and brothers  
who belong to you throughout the world.  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For your church to fulfill its mission in the world,  
showing mercy, proclaiming your good news.  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For peace and order to permeate your creation,  
And for the fulfilment of your will.  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For reconciliation among families, factions,  
and nations living in envy and conflict.  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For those betrayed, beaten, thrown down, or abandoned,  
those in bondage, fear, or distress.  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

For the special needs of those whose names  
we remember now.  
*[Names may be said aloud or in silence.]*  
**Save us, O Lord, we come to you.**

My all your creatures know your favour and love;  
Hold us all as we falter in the storm,  
and bring us safely to your promised place  
of rest and release.

We pray it all in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **Commemoration of the Faithful Departed**

And now, Father, bring to our remembrance the unity of the church in heaven and on earth, fill us with the joy of the faithful departed, and keep us faithful to you all the days of our service here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who taught us to pray, when He said, 'Our Father...'

## The Lord's Prayer

OUR Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
For ever. Amen.

## The Blessing

The Blessing of God Almighty, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you. Amen!