

## Sermon for Sunday 13 August 2023 – The Tenth Sunday after Trinity

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***1 Kings 19.9–18; Psalm 85.8–13; Romans 10.5–15; Matthew 14.22–33***

Two weeks ago we heard the section in the Gospel according to St Matthew where he grouped together a number of parables of Jesus speaking about the kingdom. We're now in chapter 14 and we need to fill in a little bit of the gap before the reading we heard today.

Matthew's grouped his teaching together at the end of the parables. He says that Jesus went to Nazareth and he taught in the synagogue and he was rejected. They saw him just as Jesus, son of Joseph, the carpenter's son, and he leaves there and he's now in Capernaum; in between, according to Matthew, there's a bit of a flashback where John the Baptist's disciples have come to him and said 'Herod has executed your cousin John'. And Jesus withdraws from there.

He withdraws from there in a boat. So it's likely he's come from Nazareth to his home, where he'd made his home in Capernaum, the north part of Lake Galilee. It wouldn't be much use trying to withdraw in a boat in Nazareth. For those of you who are wondering what on earth I'm talking about, use your sanctified imagination - imagine an upside down teardrop or something the shape of maybe South Africa or South America. That's sort of the shape of the Lake of Galilee. And Nazareth is on the western side, inland - a boat is no good to you. It's likely Jesus has come now to the north of Galilee and to Capernaum. And there the crowd find him and he teaches them.

And then we come to the story, the account of the feeding of the 5000. 5000 men, excluding women and children. Now there's two reasons that that could be. It could be that women and children were there and therefore it's 5000 plus that were fed - enough of a miracle to feed 5000 with!

What have we got here? We had the children's holiday club this week. Some of us are still recovering. But, was it the first day when we had... no, it wasn't the first day; or was the fourth day? Shows you my brain hasn't caught up. We had two fish! You're been very Anglican this morning and not sitting on the front rows, aren't you? And five loaves. So the children learnt about the feeding of the 5000. They say it's 5000 plus women and children. Or it could be, and some theologians say that this is the case, that it was 5000 men only who had gathered to try and persuade Jesus to make a political overthrow.

And that is why, when we get to our reading today, it says immediately (this is after the feeding of the 5000), immediately made his disciples get into the boat. Go ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. Some theologians say having nothing to do with being a political uprising, so it's quite forceful what he says to the disciples, go. It's not just a I suggest you go to the other side, I'll catch you up, It's GO.

And after he dismisses the crowds he goes quietly to pray. And we're told that the disciples find themselves blown off course and they are now in deep water. They're far from land, for the wind was against them. They're just traversing the northern part of the lake from west to east and likely back again because just after the reading we heard today we're told that they end up in Geneserah which is on the north-western side of the lake. But they're in deep water. I don't know about you, but when I was in Sunday School I was taught once, and I didn't like the idea of it then, but I was taught that when Jesus came walking on the water he was only doing it in the shallow bit of the north. And me being logical, I went, well, yes, then why was Peter worried about sinking? You're not with me, are you? Are we awake this morning? Okay. How many people were at Fisherman's Friends last night and had a late night? Yeah. Few of you? Okay.

It's now early in the morning. We're told in other gospel accounts it's the fourth watch of the night - that's using Roman counting - it's three to four o'clock in the morning. The disciples experienced, some of them experienced fishermen, have been blown off course. They've been trying to make their way to the other side, and they're probably in the middle of Lake Galilee; and Jesus walks towards them on the water.

Come with me in your imagination, what would that be like? You're tired. You're wondering whether you're hallucinating with tiredness or as they say, it's a ghost; because the fishermen believed that the ghosts, the souls of deceased drowned fishermen, were in the lake. Was this a ghost that had come up? And Jesus walks to them and says in the Greek, 'Ego eimi' - it's what John's Gospel talks about, 'I am'. Now. It's possible. Jesus was just saying 'I'm he'. It's possible Jesus was saying, hey, it's just me. Don't worry, don't be afraid, it's me. Or I wonder whether he is using the name of God. 'I am'. 'I am' is here. Do not be afraid.

And Peter; wonderful impetuous Peter says, 'Lord, if it is you' - ever thought about that? 'Lord, if it is you'; they've just seen Jesus feed 5000 at least they now see someone walking on the water that they decide maybe isn't a ghost. And Peter says, 'Lord, is it you?' Who on earth else is it going to be?

Is it going to be the little boy who had the five loaves and two fish put on the equivalent of snowshoes walking across the water? Sorry if I'm being too irreverent for some of you but I find this passage full of comedy. Impetuous Peter, often the spokesperson for the disciples, often used by Matthew particularly as the example disciple an example of all disciples. And he says, 'If it's you, let me walk to you'. Disciples were expected to emulate their teacher. Is this what Peter was doing, saying, 'Lord, you're my teacher. You're walking on water. I want to emulate you.'

But he waits for Jesus to say yes, okay, first. And Peter gets out of the boat, following Jesus' invitation to come to him. Note it is still windy and stormy. The disciples have ended up in a stormy situation, having followed the instructions of Jesus. Brothers and sisters, just because we follow what we believe we are being called to do, does not mean everything will be calm and easy going; sometimes we will go into stormy waters. And it is still stormy and windy when Peter gets out of the boat to emulate his teacher.

Imagine Peter; impetuous Peter. I can imagine him just turning round to the others in the boat. We made a boat; this is something else - you're going to hear more about holiday club later, but I won't say whose boat this is... We discovered that the rector likes Lego - keep him happy for hours. But this is a boat; we were told it's a bit scary because there are actually some ghosts in there. We had great fun. But can you imagine Peter turning round to the other disciples in the boat going, 'Hey yaboo, sucks, I'm walking on water, you're not.' And then he notices that it's still windy and stormy and he's overwhelmed by the circumstances and he starts to sink.

Maybe that's the lesson for us. The writers of the Hebrew says this, 'Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely. In this case, let us run with perseverance the race that sets before us looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.' Not looking to the circumstances around us, but looking to Jesus. Maybe if we're sinking, our cry is like Peter, 'Lord, save me.'

Many years ago, when my daughter was young, we encouraged her to go to the school youth club. She wasn't that keen to go, but she went. Unbeknownst to us, someone who had been bullying her in school was also going to the youth club that night. And I took a phone call. My phone rings, it's my daughter. And all I heard was 'Dad, dad!' That's all I needed to grab my keys, jump into my car. Those of you know I like driving fast BMWs - I had a particularly fast one at the time; and I drove from my house in Cavendish, for those that you know it, to what is now Stour Valley School, what was Clare Middle School, at such a speed that when I was speaking to police officers later, giving a statement, the police officer said, you rang us at this time. You arrived at this time. The distance between your house and here means that you broke the speed limit. We'll leave that to one side. I heard my daughter in trouble. I just had to hear, dad, that was enough to get me in the car. I let the information catch up later and I wonder whether that's how Peter said it.

Or do you think Peter said, 'Oh God, I have followed you, I've given up my fishing nets, I've done this, that and the other for you. You've been faithful in the past. I've just seen you feed 5000. I'm struggling. Please lift me out of the water, otherwise I will drown.' Or maybe he recited Psalm 69, 'Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there's no foothold. I have come into deep waters.' No, I think Peter just went, 'Lord, save.' The little Greek, the verb tells us we add in the me. Peter just said 'Lord, save.' And in response to Peter's desperate cry, Jesus just reaches out his hand. You notice when Peter cries out 'Save', Jesus doesn't teach him about not having faith and then reach out his hand. He reaches out his hand and then says some words of encouragement, 'Have faith.'

So, brothers and sisters, this morning, in the storms of life, what might you need saving from? We use 'save' as shorthand. What might you need rescuing from? What is causing you to feel like you are drowned? You may not be in that place, and that's good. But if you are, whether that is simply to be saved from the fact that you live in broken humanity, or there's something more specific, can I encourage you just reach out this morning, just speak out and say 'Lord, save.' As we come to communion this morning, as we remember the greatest example of Jesus reaching out; I don't know which eucharistic prayer we're using this morning, but one of the Eucharistic prayers has the words that Jesus on the cross stretched out

his hands, stretched out his arms. Maybe as you come to communion this morning, you need to say 'Lord, save me', and see those outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross saving.

Because the imagery that's used of Jesus walking on the water is something that in the Old Testament, only God could do. Read about that - Psalm 77, Job 9, Isaiah 43. It's only God who walks on the waters. It is only God. But when we cry 'Save me', that something can be done about it. Amen.