9th Sunday after Trinity (Year A)

St Catherine, Manston

Sermon

Matthew 14: 22-33

It is hard to imagine a person walking on water so it must have been quite a sight, almost crazy to have been a witness to such an event. Some of you might recall that in 2011 a very famous street magician did just that, he walked on water. In fact he walked out onto the River Themes; he walked about 91 meters or a hundred yards before he stopped with his arms raised. He was picked up by the River Police in a dingy. His name is Dynamo, real name Steven Frayne who is a great magician. After the dingy picked him up, it swung round and brought him back to his starting point on the bank but as it neared the shore it hit something submerged; this something was quite long and large and quite transparent; it was sitting just below the water line. That is the bit that wasn't shown in his TV programme.

There is another story written a few thousand years before Dynamo; it's the story of Jesus walking on water. This account appears in three of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, John). But, only in Matthew do we read that Peter also walked on the water!

The Matthew account begins with Jesus, having just had a day of miracles, of feeding the 5000 and healing many dismissing the crowd and sending them home. Jesus then heads the disciples off toward a moored boat and sets them sailing toward the next destination; he sends them ahead of him. Jesus then climbs up a mountain and prays. Later, after coming down he just stands for a while in this now silent place, in the dark and alone.

But the disciples were not having a good time of it. Their boat was being battered by a storm and pushed against the wind, it was hardly moving. Understandably they were afraid. Then out of the gloom of the storm a figure, which is walking on the water comes toward them. They were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. I think we all would have felt that terror but Jesus lets it be known that it is him and for them to take courage. They can hear Jesus above the storm.

Peter is not quite sure about what is going on and shouts out into the wind Lord, if it's you tell me to come to you on the water. Jesus says, come, come on then! And he does and it's ok but then Peter begins to sink and Jesus has to grab him to save him. (But at least Peter got out of the boat)

And ever since Peter began to sink, some have criticized him for his lack of faith. But, I have yet to see any of his critics, indeed anyone at all; including great magicians repeat this feat. If we have a closer look at Peter walking on water in response to Jesus' walking on water, we can note a few things.

First off at least Peter got out of the boat. We need to remember that all Peter sees is what everyone else can see. He's in the boat which is caught up in a storm and he is as terrified as the rest of them. It's a ghost they cry! So Peter's response is to almost

defiantly shout out into the wind: Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water. And when Jesus told him with a single word, come, Peter obeyed. No questions, no ifs or buts but complete trust and obedience.

Now for me all the laws of physics that ever were scream out that this makes no sense, but Peter simply did what Jesus told him to do. I wonder if that was me in that boat would I A be looking for Jesus and B would I do what Jesus told me to do if I found him.

Second Point, at least Peter got out of the boat. He looked for Jesus and kept on looking to Jesus as the storm surrounded him, he was focused on Jesus. The problems started when he stopped looking at Jesus. What we can take from this is clear; when our lives are enveloped in a turbulent storm we need to look for Jesus and when we find him, keep on looking to Jesus.

I think what I am trying to say is that faith is as simple as taking the next step. Peter took one step to get out of the boat and the next was onto the water. Peter was doing fine when he was focused on the next step, and only got into trouble when he lost sight of the next step. Fear took him under and this same fear will also sink us too if we let it. When Peter had faith, he walked on water. When he had fear, he sank in water.

This fear factor is the same for all of us. Fear will sink us. I wonder if you know that good old hymn 'What a friend we have in Jesus'? It was penned by a preacher named Joseph M. Scriven as a poem in 1855, he wrote it to comfort his mother, who was living in Ireland while he was in Canada. The third verse of the hymn reads

> Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
> We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Take it to the Lord, what good advice that is. These words ring so true especially in these modern times where fear is in abundance and life is not easy. I wonder if in our lives there is anything fearful that is gripping and controlling us and affecting the decisions we make. Peter in hope shouted at what the others thought to be a ghost walking on the water, is that you Lord! He shouted. We should never be discouraged from shouting out in our own personal storm, where are you Lord, or is that you Lord. We too need to look for Jesus and then look to Jesus.

The final point, at least Peter got out of the boat. So, when I think of the mighty St Peter, who started the Roman Church and did so many wondrous things, I also remember that at the passion he ran away, that he denied Jesus and when Jesus died Peter left the scene and went back to fishing; to what he knew.

But Jesus saves us all from many things. Jesus not only saved Peter for all eternity, but on this occasion Jesus saved Peter from a watery grave. But it was a little bit of faith that got him started. It is so true that a little faith is better than no faith at all. And a little bit of faith is all we need to get started too! But if we want to walk on water, first we got to get out of the boat. Amen

Rev. Pete Bone
9th August 2020