

Walking on Water

I have a problem with water. A large part of my body is composed of water, and I like to drink water, wash with it, throw it on people (only sometimes, when its hot!). But when it comes to swimming, I am not a strong swimmer. When it comes to floating, well you may have heard the expression sink or swim, that's me. I try to float, try to "relax" as I am instructed, head back but them legses they just sink. Just sink!

That is why this story, that we hear today, sends cold shivers down my spine. It raises the issues I have about water and about the focus of my faith.

Just before our story starts, there had been two significant events; first, the news of John the Baptist's death, which saddened Jesus immensely. He wanted to go to a lonely place to reflect and pray. But his lonely place was the scene of the second significant event. As word travelled fast (and they didn't have electronic social media) there were soon 5000 men and countless more women and children. Some lonely place! In the middle of His quest for a quiet place, the compassion of Jesus once more showed its beautiful presence. A miraculous feeding of the whole gathering, with food left over.

In need of a place to think and pray, Jesus sent his disciples in their boat to go to the other side of the lake. He urged the crowd to leave. He then found His quiet place as He went up the mountain to pray. As evening fell, the boat was some way offshore and was being buffeted by the wind and the waves. But it is not until the fourth watch of the night, or between 3am and 6am that Jesus went to join His disciples.

Imagine if you will they are in a boat being buffeted by wind and waves. They had a big day yesterday; feeding 5000 men and numerous others really tires you out, and not much sleep in a rocky boat. I think they would have been so weary in that early part of the morning, and then they see something.

It looks like Jesus, but the person they see is walking on water. Not surprising they thought it was a ghost and they were afraid. A number of them are fishermen, they know the dangers of the water.

But Jesus quickly identified Himself. In today's language it may have been "Hey guys, don't worry, it's me!".

Peter, the one disciple who is often very quick in speaking his mind, said "If it is you Lord, tell me to come to you on the water". Coming out of tiredness and fear, this is an amazing challenge for Peter to issue. Did he think that he could walk on water? My guess is that he didn't think, which means that he believed that Jesus could empower him to walk on water. Now that is faith and belief.

Jesus says "Come"

So Peter steps out of the boat, believing he can walk on water too.

Keeping his eyes on Jesus, Peter walks towards Jesus. Then the reality of the situation hits him. It's windy, there are strong waves. I am walking on water. Fear sets in and he begins to sink! He cries out "Lord, help me". A cry repeated by so many faithful followers in the last two thousand years.

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. He didn't talk, he acted first, ensuring Peter was safe, then He talked. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

On reaching the boat the wind stopped, and the disciples said (not for the first time, I believe) "Truly, you are the Son of God".

The way I see it, is that Peter was fine while he was looking at Jesus, but when he allowed worldly issues, like wind and waves and the idea of walking on water, to distract him, he began to sink.

This is our greatest challenge. We live in a modern challenging, fast moving world. We want to follow Jesus, but there are so many distractions and interruptions to take us away from where our focus should be; and that is on worshipping God and following Jesus. It should be simple, sadly it's not. And we begin to sink.

I'd like to share some reflections from the young people of our church about this passage:

God sometimes does not help straight away because he wants to test your trust and faith.

God might not help us straight away because he gives us time to realise that we can't figure it out ourselves and He helps us think about it in another way or think about hidden clues He has given already.

What do we learn about God?

That Jesus is the true God

He wants us to put our faith in Him

He can do anything in His power

God is always there to help me whenever I'm in need

God can perform mind blowing miracles

What do we learn about people?

People can believe in Jesus

People's trust and faith in God can waver

People's faith is weak

People are not like God, and yet so desperately need Him

How can I apply what I've learnt to my life?

That I need to obey God

Keep my trust in God even when it is challenging

Showing my faith in God and standing strong where I am with His help.

Those thoughts sum up rather well, I think, the message of this story.

In so many ways, we need to keep our focus on God, to trust Him, to love Him and to love one another.

In doing these things, we may not walk on water, but who know what miracles might happen when we let God into our lives?

Maybe you will walk on water.

Amen

Mr. Andrew Crook

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