

Sermon Sunday 27 September 2020 Faith (Jesus walking on water)

Matthew 14:22-33

This is a wonderful story about faith. I am reminded of the story of the atheist spending a quiet day fishing when his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. The beast tosses him and the boat high into the air, and then it opens its mouth to swallow him. The man cries out, 'O my God, please help me!' Suddenly, the attack scene freezes. As the atheist hangs in mid-air, a voice from heaven says, 'I thought you didn't believe in me.' The man replies, 'Come on, God, give me a break. Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either.'

Back to our reading. First of all, let's set the scene. This takes place just after the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus sends his disciples away in a boat while he disperses the crowd and then takes himself away to pray. So the disciples are out in the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. It is the middle of the night and a storm arises. Then, lo and behold, Jesus comes walking towards them on the water.

So we have our first message of this story. When we are accosted by the storms of life, God is there for us. Not one of us escapes these storms – they are part of life. We have choices as to how we deal with these storms. One choice, a choice I thoroughly recommend, is to reach out to God. He comes into his own when dealing with life's struggles. But it does call for a degree of faith, which leads on to the second part of our story.

Peter, being the rather impulsive person he is, thinks *I can probably do this too*. So he gets out of the boat and starts walking towards Jesus. He is doing quite well until, and this is the critical point, he takes his eyes off Jesus, looks around at these fearsome waves, and thinks *Oh dear, I might be in a spot of trouble here*. And he starts to sink. But he reaches out to Jesus who pulls him up and they both clamber into the boat.

So at a critical point Peter's faith did let him down, but he didn't completely fail because he did reach out to Jesus and Jesus was able to rescue him. And therein lies the heart of the story. In the end, if we have the confidence, the faith to reach out to God, we will receive the helping hand that will lift us out of our predicament. Let me share a story with you.

A minister tells of one of the most frightening, yet thought-provoking experiences of his life. His ministry took him to all parts of the United States, necessitating countless flights. On this occasion, he had been on a long flight when the sign flashed on, 'Fasten your seatbelts.' Then after a while a calm voice said, 'We will not be serving beverages at this time as we are expecting a little turbulence. Please be sure your seatbelt is fastened.'

As he looked around the aircraft, it became obvious that many of the passengers were becoming apprehensive. A little later, the announcer said, 'We are so sorry that we are unable to serve the meal at this time. The turbulence is still ahead of us.'

Then the storm broke. The ominous cracks of thunder could be heard even above the roar of the engines. Lightning lit up the darkening skies, and within moments the plane was like a cork tossed around on a celestial ocean. One moment the plane was lifted on terrific currents of air, the next it dropped as if it were about to plummet earthwards.

The minister confessed that he shared the discomfort and fear of those around him. He looked around the plane and he could see that nearly all the passengers were alarmed and upset. Some were praying. Many were obviously wondering if they were going to make it through the storm.

Then he suddenly saw a little girl. Apparently the storm meant nothing to her. She had her feet tucked beneath her as she sat on her seat. She was reading a book and everything within her world was calm and orderly. Sometimes she would close her eyes, then she would read again. Worry and fear were simply not part of her world. When the plane was being buffeted by the terrible storm, when it lurched this way and that way, as it rose and fell, when all the adults were scared half to death, this little girl was completely composed. The minister could scarcely believe his eyes.

When the plane finally and safely reached its destination, all the passengers were relieved to disembark. The minister found himself walking beside the little girl and he couldn't help commenting to her that she appeared to be so calm throughout what was quite a frightening ordeal. He asked her why she had not been afraid.

The girl replied, 'Because my daddy's the pilot, and he's taking me home.'

What a wonderful image that is. Life is not easy, but just as you would not contemplate climbing Mt Everest without a Sherpa guide, so do we need a guide if we are to conquer those mountains that are inclined to pop up in our journey of life.. There is no better guide than God. We just need the faith to reach out for his hand.