

**Matthew 14:22-33**

I want to revisit the story of Jesus walking on water, for reasons which will become apparent.

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 freezes. As the atheist hangs in mid-air, a voice from above 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!'

You know, it is quite amazing how often people who normally wouldn't give God a thought, will call upon him when trauma strikes. It just goes to show, deep down in everyone faith resides. Sometimes, it just takes a bit of prodding to stir it into life.

Back to our gospel 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 late at 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 a 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 me 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 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*. 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 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 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 particular occasion, he had been on a long flight when the sign flashed on, 'Fasten your seatbelts.' Then after a short 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 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 this 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 out of their wits, this little girl was completely composed. The minister could not believe his eyes.

When the plane finally and safely landed, 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 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, just as Peter did.

I refer you to the last verse of our first reading from Philippians, *'I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength I need.'*

I want to finish by referencing this story of Jesus walking on the water with our journey towards the building of our new church, and this is why I am coming back to this story at this particular time.

To say we have experienced a few storms along the way would be an understatement. It has been a challenging journey, but it would be fair to say that over the past few weeks, like Peter, we have actually made a few tentative steps out of the boat, but also like Peter, we are not quite there yet, and like Peter we need reach out to Christ in order to complete our journey.

Let us not forget this, our church is all about Christ. Whether it is our worship or whether it is our reaching out to the community through the community centre, it is all done in his name, in his honour and under his authority.

Let me quote from Ephesians 1:22-23, *'And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence.'*

Let us learn from Peter and not take our eyes off Christ. The end is in sight, or would it be more apposite to say the beginning is in sight. But we are not quite there yet, so we reach out in faith and in hope, as we ask Christ to pull us, perhaps not back into the boat, but across that starting line.

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