

10th Sunday after Pentecost - Sermon delivered 9th August 2020
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Matthew 14:22-36 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

"22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 28 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 29 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognised Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all who were ill to him 36 and begged him to let those who were ill just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed."

There are as many variations of being Christian as there are Christians but there are only two major groupings into which all in some way find themselves. Those who take risks and those who play it safe. What type of Christian are you?

Most of us are familiar with today's Gospel passage and many of us are quick to recognise Peter's failing as his focus was drawn away from Jesus and toward the wind. But, is this really the point of the passage. I suggest to a degree, yes; but there is more. I actually think Peter receives an unfair amount of poor press by people exploring this passage. Consider for a moment, while Peter's loss of focus does lead to his loss of buoyancy and need for rescue, is it possible that in fact it is not Peter who failed, but rather the apostles who unlike Peter were too afraid to even try to reach Jesus, so remained safe in the boat.

Imagine for a moment, you are on a boat in Moreton Bay, in fact you have been there for many hours, the wind is up and the water choppy. Then as if physics have turned upside-down, someone you think is Jesus turns up, walking on the water and calling out you to come (out of the boat) toward him. Amazingly before being distracted Peter had faith to get out of the boat.

How might any of us reacted? Like the other disciples I'd have wanted to stay in the boat

That's the point, none of the other disciples displayed the same trust that Peter did. Yes after stepping onto the water and taking a few steps peter begins to sink, but first Peter took a leap of faith. So where did it all go wrong

I believe it was when Peter took his eyes off Christ and looked at what was going on around him – and he suddenly realised his predicament, he began to doubt, and it was only when he looked back to Christ that he was safe.

Who here wants to see the church grow, the word of God and example of Jesus spread throughout the world?

I suspect we all do, so are we prepared to get out of the boat? Are we ready and willing to take a leap of faith, or are we worried that there might be a risk?

If we are to succeed as followers of Jesus we must be willing to take risks, John Ortberg in his book "If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat" makes this point.

Only by stepping out of the security of the boat can we be truly free to work for God. Fear that we are not good enough, we will be ridiculed, our need for security actually hinder our capacity to be useful for Gods mission. God doesn't just call the talented and outgoing in the Church to get out of the boat and join him on the water. He calls you and me too!

Let me share a story.

Even as a child I sensed a calling to priestly ministry. As Roman Catholic, meeting and marrying Ursula led me to believe this was not where God was calling me. Identifying as Anglican was not part of my plan, but without my intention it happened and God gave me a choice, take the risk, explore what has happened, be authentic, or hide and be lost. Ursula suggested I had better not be doing this so that I could be a priest, I assured her I was not. In fact I was not really happy with what was going on. I come from a very traditional Maltese Catholic family, I was not sure how to even bring the topic up with my parents. Again, I was given a choice, be authentic and tell them or not and lie.

Eventually life and knowing Jesus led me full circle. The sense of call to priestly ministry had never for all my efforts truly gone away. In fact looking back I can see how God was preparing me, without Ursula and many others I would not have made decisions as I did to attend an Anglican church, to explore my relationship with God to recognise Jesus calling me to trust him, to take a leap of faith.

Why do I tell you this? Well I stand before you a man, a husband, father, son, brother. A man who has experienced great Joy and just as great sorrow, a man who has lied, cheated, ridiculed others and so much more. I am a person who is prone to doubting my ability, who struggles with ADD and dyslexia. Yet because I stepped toward Jesus, because I took the risk of being authentic to my faith my relationship with God, I have found myself placed before you by God and the Church as a priest. I am not suggesting it is easy once you step out of the boat, it is easy to be distracted and overwhelmed but by refocussing on Jesus my buoyancy was regained.

God wants people who are prepared to get out of the boat when he calls them

Why do I share that story with you.

Because God can use anyone – you or me – to walk on water if we are prepared to get out of the boat.

You may not be called to priestly ministry, neither is god literally calling me to walk on water, but getting out of the boat might simply mean a call to serve on the Parish Council or as a Churchwarden, or other ways you may have not yet considered.

There are three W's surrounding Peter's courageous experience of walking on the water.

The first is Waiting for Jesus call

Peter was keen to step outside the boat but he realised that unless Jesus called him – it was being foolhardy. If we are called by God to a ministry – it is we who respond to the call – we don't instigate it.

The second is walking - the actual experience of walking on the water

When Christ called - Peter responded. And he got out of the boat When he obeyed he found himself walking on the water. Imagine what that experience must have been like - walking on water.

The third, being Waylaid by the Circumstances.

Peter managed to get waylaid - because he took his eye off the ball - or more precisely off Jesus. He started to look at the problems - the storm raging around him and that is when he began to sink.

Here we are, almost two thousand years after the time of Jesus. We are part of the universal Christian community, specifically we are the community of St Thomas Nth Ipswich. A community founded and sustained through a committed to the theology and traditions of the church, rightly proud of it's 140 something year history, a community committed to being here for the future, or not. Do we just float safely in the boat or do we respond to Jesus calling us to step out?