

**Reflection by Revd Jane Braund for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020 ~ Trinity 9**  
**St Mary & All Saints Church, Fillongley**

This story of Jesus walking on the water follows immediately after the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus had gone off somewhere to be quiet and alone after learning of John the Baptist's beheading by Herod, but the crowd, having heard where He was, followed Him to this quiet lonely place. Rather than turning them away or trying to escape Himself, Jesus had compassion on them and healed the sick. In his love for them, he wouldn't let the crowd go without first making sure they were fed.

And so this is the backdrop to Jesus walking on the water. After the people had been fed, He told the disciples to leave in the boat, to go ahead of Him, while He dismissed the crowd because He still wanted time, on His own, to pray and be with His Father. By the time evening came He was still there on His own, with the disciples already on the Lake - and they were starting to feel the effects of a severe storm.

It was during the fourth watch of the night that Jesus came out to the disciples walking on the water. Jews divided the night into three watches but the Romans divided it into four and the fourth watch was between the hours of 3 and 6 am. In other words Jesus had been there all night praying, spending time with his Father, and then He had gone out to the disciples walking on the water.

When the disciples first saw Jesus they were terrified. You can imagine it can't you – the wind howling against the boat, the waves and the rain crashing against it – fighting to make any kind of headway because the wind was against them. Being in that place – already terrified – it is easy to see how they thought they were seeing a ghost, and became even more frightened in their exhausted state.

The disciples were starting to flag. They were persevering, doing what Jesus had told them to do, but the storm had gone on all night with the boat being buffeted, tormented by the waves. Now somewhere between 3 and 6 am they were growing really weary, and doubts and fears were being stirred up and beginning to creep in. I'm sure it doesn't need me to spell out how we can relate that to ourselves and our own lives and situations.

Jesus knew what was happening to them and so He came to them walking on the water. From where He was He might well have witnessed the storm brewing on the lake, He might have seen their struggle, but the point is he knew what was happening. He had already shown the disciples that He had authority over the weather (Matthew ch 8), he'd also already done lots of miracles – only yesterday He had fed 5,000 with just 5 loaves and 2 fish and now He was coming to them walking on the water. This was not someone who was affected by what was happening in the natural!!

In many ways it's no wonder they were frightened and yet it was their fears that were playing on their minds – and isn't that the same for us? – so often it is our fears that make situations worse!! Fear can overcome us and often blinds us to the presence of the Lord, especially if we don't think he appears when he should, or appears in ways we aren't expecting him! Yet there is a real assurance here for us, that when we are facing difficult times, God does not sit idly by detached from our circumstances. He knows and he appears at exactly the right time.

Recognition came to the disciples when He spoke to them. They knew exactly who it was then. He didn't say 'Hey, it's me Jesus'. No! He said 'Take courage. I am! Don't be afraid!'

At that point there was a mind shift. There was a change in the atmosphere. Where there had been doubt and fear and unbelief and the things in the natural seemed to be overwhelming them – the

wind, waves and so on - suddenly, with Jesus saying 'I am' they knew who was with them. 'I am' - the one who created the waters and the winds, is here and is in control. 'I am' the name God gives himself (Ex 3) It wasn't that the storm ceased, the point is they were no longer consumed by what was happening around them, no longer affected by the storm in the same way. That's true for us too. What we look at, what we stay fixed and focused on is key to how we live our lives and how we will be affected by things that happen in our life.

As a driving instructor I found that at first, many students found it difficult to hold a straight course on the road. I had to teach them where they should be looking so that they could maintain a safe straight position on the road. It's not that they were oblivious to anything else that was happening around them, but their focus had to be on maintaining their course. When you drive, whatever you look at is what you steer to, so if you focus on the white lines in the middle of the road you will steer towards it. If you focus on the car coming towards you, unfortunately you steer towards it. If you focus on your speedometer or something that is happening in the car, you can lose control completely. Scan, be aware, but keep focused on the road ahead.

It's the same for us, we need to stay fixed and focused on the Lord, whatever comes along, because if we get distracted by it we start to veer off course. We can see that with Peter. When Peter knew it was Jesus He stopped looking at all the things that were happening around him, and with His eyes fixed on Jesus He said 'If it is you, tell me to come to You on the water'. Peter the impetuous one wanted to be with Jesus. He didn't wait for the storm to calm but instead, when Jesus called him he got out of the boat in the midst of all the chaos.

All went well to start with, but then...that really big wave caught his eye, that extra strong gust of wind distracted him and suddenly Peter looked at them rather than Jesus and he felt himself sinking. Doesn't that happen to us? We think we're looking at Jesus then suddenly all the cares and worries of our situations, or things happening in the nation, or whatever it is, seem to overwhelm us and that's what we look at rather than keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

But as Peter starts to sink and drown, he looks back to Jesus and as he cries out so Jesus stretches out his hand and saves him. Sometimes, we can criticise Peter's failure and think he hadn't grown much as a disciple, but we need to consider -how much faith and trust do you and I really walk in? Are we even prepared to get out of a boat that is moored and walk on land when Jesus calls us, let alone one that is in the middle of the sea?

Jesus calls to us to step out of the boat, to get out of our comfort zone and walk to him on the water despite all the chaos that is raging, despite all the things that threaten to overwhelm us at the moment. He says fix your eyes on me because I am the author and the finisher of your faith. Even if we start to sink, we have the assurance that Jesus is there to lift us back up, to help us dust ourselves down and start again, because the amazing thing is, that he believes in us too. So, the question is, are we willing to step out of the boat and go to him? Amen.

Prayer: Lord as we hear you call to us over the stormy waters of life give us a new boldness in our spirit to answer your call. We ask that you would give us a fresh infilling of your Spirit to equip us and enable us to be your faithful servants, willing to step out of our comfort zone for you, knowing that you are there beside us. Lord we love you and want to serve you help us to keep our eyes fixed on you, amen.