

Reflection from Revd Liz Jones on Matthew 14: vs 22-33

Jesus walks on water

(To be preached at Corley Church Sunday 9th August 2020 10:30am Service)

I admire people who do risky things like extreme sports. People who bungee jump, or jump out of planes, sky dive, or deep sea dive. It must take a lot of nerve to do some of those things. I enjoy swimming but I've never been one to dive in off a diving board. I remember many years ago at Coventry swimming baths watching some teenagers diving off the diving boards. There were 3 levels, the first one was the board only about 2ft off the water, the second one was about 10ft above the water and the top one was about 25ft above the water. I watched the boys, they all confidently dived off the first board, then most of them did the 2nd level but only 3 of them went up to the top level. They spent ages walking to the edge and looking over, in the end just 2 of them jumped from the top board, squealing as they went through the air.

Our gospel passage today, doesn't speak about someone diving off a top board, but it does talk about Peter getting out of the boat, stepping into a raging sea to meet Jesus as he walks across the water towards them. When it comes to Peter walking on the water, I have often heard people condemn him for his lack of faith. True, Jesus does call Peter a man of little faith, but what about the other 11? None of them got out of the boat. If Peter had little faith, then they had none, none of them were prepared to take that step out of the boat.

When the disciples first see Jesus coming at them they mistake Him for a ghost. They have spent the whole night afraid the storm would drown them, and now a ghost shows up. Things were going from bad, to worse, It was the epitome of out of the frying pan and into the fire.

We can just imagine the fear that they were feeling, lost and abandoned in the middle of a storm, then Jesus is there walking towards them. Peter sees him and when Jesus tells him to come, he does, he stands up in the rocking boat with the huge waves all around and he steps off the boat towards Jesus. At this point he is putting all his faith in him, he has his eyes fixed completely upon him.

Peter leaves the boat when he knows that it is Jesus on the water and not a ghost, and for a little while he walks on the water. Peter does the impossible, but then things change. Peter took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the storm.

When Peter got out of the boat he was focused on Jesus, on the source of his power. Then Peter shifted his focus from the source of his power to the problems that surrounded him. He starts to sink because he gets distracted from Jesus, the source of power. Distractions can come in two forms, the obvious and the subtle.

Peter gets distracted by the obvious stuff. The thunder booms, the lightning cracks, the wind whips, and the waves pound. There's a storm going on around Peter. It's easy to see why he gets distracted. He's afraid. Just a few moments ago he was hiding in the boat from the storm, now he is exposed in the middle of the storm.

When we choose to focus on the problems rather than the power, we sacrifice our connection with Jesus. Jesus is a power greater than the problems we face. When our problems distract us from Jesus, we turn from the greatest power there is to a lesser power. John writes in I John 4:4, "the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." If we focus on the problems then we will lose sight of the one greater than anything.

We can also get distracted by subtle things. If you are like me, then you get a lot of offers to be involved in some good things. They are not problems, but they demand time and attention. How often do you evaluate those things in light of the kingdom of God and eternity? Do you ever ask yourself, "Is this part of God's will for my life?" "Will this help the kingdom of God advance?" "Will this make an eternal difference in someone's life?" Now, they may be good projects, noble endeavours, but they may also distract you from your main focus.

The problem is we get too busy for Jesus. I have a friend whose wife says, "If the devil cannot make you bad, then he will make you busy." Wise words. We can get distracted by good things as well as bad. We do not need to get busy just doing good things, we need to get busy doing the things Christ has for us to do.

In Luke 9:51 we read, "When the days were coming to a close for Him to be taken up, He was determined to journey to Jerusalem." Jesus knew that he must go to the cross. It was His life mission. He could have healed more people if He had not died at 33. He could have preached, taught, and converted many more people if He had delayed the cross five or 10 years. Those are all good things, but they were not his purpose. Jesus maintained a single focus: the cross. He would not be distracted by the obvious problems, Pharisees, Scribes, and opposition. Nor would he be deterred by subtle issues, healing, teaching, and preaching.

It is easy for the problems of this world to distract us from Jesus. Particularly in these uncertain times, living with a pandemic and the constant changes that we all have to get used to. We must also be careful to not become so busy that we stray from the purpose Christ has for our lives. When Peter got back into the boat with Jesus, the disciples worshiped Jesus. We get the feeling that this worship of Him was different. Amazingly this is not a first-time event for the disciples. Earlier in Matthew chapter 8, the disciples are in the boat when a storm comes up. So bad is the storm that they think they will die. Sound familiar? Only instead of walking on the water, Jesus is asleep in the boat. The disciples wake Jesus, and He speaks to the winds and the waves and the storm calms. The disciples look at one another and say, "What kind of man is this? – even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Compare that with what they confess here. Now they say that Jesus is the Son of God.

I encourage you to reflect for a moment. When the storms of life come, how long will you wait till you call on Jesus? Or, do you often try to think your way out of problems and search for others who can get us out of our problems, before we look to Jesus? Why is Jesus not our first refuge in difficult times? No matter how we answer that question, there is a deeper problem: We doubt Jesus. We trust our skills, our intellect, our money, our position, or our connections more than we do the Son of God. We may only turn to Jesus as a last result. We put Jesus on a time limit. If He does not handle our problem within a certain amount of time, we assume that He does not care, is not able, or is too busy. So we go to someone or something else. Not only must Christ be our first choice, He must become our only choice.

It takes faith to trust in Jesus and he may not come when you want, do what you want, or follow your every direction, but Jesus does care. He is all-powerful, and he will help. Notice that the storms do not calm down until Jesus gets into the boat. The whole experience with Peter walking on the water happened while the storm raged. Sometimes Jesus does not remove the problems of life, but He comes alongside and walks with you through them.

That's where trust and faith come in. Our journey through life needs to be built on Jesus and Him alone, not Jesus and something, or someone else. When we realize that all we need is Jesus we will trust Him. It will not matter if the storms rage, or the lightning flashes. All that will matter to us is that we have Jesus. We need to let go of any doubts in His ability and any questions about if this is the right course for our life.

Something to ponder on in the days ahead: Are there some fears that cause you to be disillusioned and keep you from risking it all for Christ? Could it be that you have allowed those fears to become greater than they really are? Are problems distracting you from the love and mercy of the one who died for you?

Whatever it is, the One greater than fears, problems, and doubts is here. Jesus is waiting for you to believe in Him and risk it all. He calls you to Come on, leave the boat and stepping out upon on the water, keep your eyes fixed on Him and he will save you.

Amen