Matthew 14:22-33 Jesus walks on Water 9th Sunday after Trinity 9th Aug 2020

Have you ever thought about how big your faith needs to be for it to be acceptable to God? If our faith is small, does that mean that he will only listen to us a small amount? Only answering small prayers, and perhaps not really loving us very much?

But then, that puts all the emphasis on US, and the Lord is just seen as a bystander who reacts to us.

Let us see how today’s passage from Matthew helps us to look at the issue of faith from a different perspective.

Matthew 14:22-33

**Jesus Walks on the Water**

**22**Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23**And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24**but the boat by this time was a long way[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+14%3A22-33&version=ESVUK#fen-ESVUK-23621a)] from the land,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+14%3A22-33&version=ESVUK#fen-ESVUK-23621b)] beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. **25**And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. **26**But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. **27**But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

**28**And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” **29**He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. **30**But when he saw the wind,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+14%3A22-33&version=ESVUK#fen-ESVUK-23627c)] he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” **31**Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32**And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33**And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (ESV)

Last week’s passage helped us explore Jesus’ power and authority over creation, when he fed over 5000 people with just 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Today’s reading follows straight on from there. It was late in the day when Jesus made the disciples get in the boat and go to the other side of the lake, which was about 4-5 miles away. St Matthew emphasises that Jesus then dismissed the crowds and went up on the mountain to be alone, and pray.

Jesus would have known what was ahead of him; the start of that final journey towards the world-changing, but desperately difficult events in Jerusalem. He was a man of prayer, in union with God, the Father and the Holy Spirit, and so it was natural for him to allocate that time to pray, for prayer was central to his mission and everything he did.

We then pick the story up in the early hours of the morning, between 3 and 6am, the poor disciples have been hard-pressed all-night, rowing and battling the wind and waves against them. According to St John’s gospel account, they had gone about 3 miles, and so they were still a mile or two from the other side.

The disciples were about to learn a vitally important lesson in faith. They saw him walking on the water, as if he were walking on a stone path. They were terrified, thinking that what they saw was a ghost, and they called out in fear. But the response that comes back is one of great assurance. Not only are they told to “Take heart” and “Do not be afraid.” But Jesus uses a phrase that would instantly be recognised by them.

Remember, they have already seen the wind and the waves obey Jesus previously. In Matthew, Chapter 8, after Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus and the disciples cross the lake but the boat was being swamped by a great storm. And just hours before, they had witnessed his act of creation when he broke the five loaves and gave them to the disciples, who then gave them to the huge crowd.

It was a powerful act, and now they hear Jesus say: “It is I.” or more literally in the Greek: “I am.” “I am”, the great words recorded in the Book of Exodus, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. “I AM”.

Here, the teacher they had been following and watching all this time, was teaching them a crucially important lesson.

From the Old Testament books of Joel, Habakkuk and Psalms, the disciples would have known that it is God’s role alone, to subdue the sea and walk upon it:

Ps 77:11, 19 …..

**11**I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
    yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

**19**Your way was through the sea,
    your path through the great waters;
    yet your footprints were unseen.

Job 9:8 where Job speaks of the LORD as He:

**8**who alone stretched out the heavens
    and trampled the waves of the sea;

Here is Jesus, not only walking on the sea, but now his words of “I AM” brings the disciples to a crucial point in their journey of trust and faith.

Peter responds first, and asks Jesus to call him out onto the water as well. Jesus doesn’t reprimand him and tell him to stop being ridiculous, no, Jesus is positive about Peter’s idea and calls him with the simple command: “Come”.

Well, we know what happens: It is all okay to start with, as Peter steps out of the boat and starts miraculously walking towards Jesus, he keeps his focus on him. But then, he gets distracted and sees the wind, and he becomes afraid as the force of the wind takes his attention away from trusting in Jesus, and he starts to sink. He may be afraid, but he looks to Jesus again and has learnt the lesson of who to trust. He cries out to Jesus, “Lord, save me.”

We often focus on Peter, and may think him foolhardy and weak in faith, but he is just an infant in terms of his spiritual journey. It is just starting to blossom, and Peter is learning that lives which are focused on Jesus develop a deeper faith in Him, but the distractions of the world around us can take our focus, and trust away from him.

That faith and trust was probably strengthened even further, as Peter and Jesus then walk to the boat together.

The other disciples were perhaps not as advanced in their faith as Peter, for they all remain in the boat. But, they would have watched these events and also learnt from them. And they declare to one another and to Jesus who is before them, that he is the Son of God, and they worship him there and then, in that boat.

We are all on a journey of learning to have faith in Jesus. It does not matter how long we have been a Christian, one day or many, many years. For some, that trust comes quickly and easily and for others, it is a lifetime of learning. But all Christians have to start somewhere, learning to take the first tentative steps of faith, like an infant learning those first few steps before falling down, and then trying again and again. It takes time and practice, and like a parent helping a child to stand, so we see Jesus doing the same with Peter on the water.

Even as we go on in life, we will still find ourselves falling down on occasions, learning year on year what it means to trust Jesus and his promises, as we step out in faith. The problem is, that we are often too comfortable sitting down and not taking the steps the lord calls us to.

That stepping out, is about not always trying to be safe in the boat, but looking upon Jesus as we step over the side to try something new or different in our walk with Jesus. It may be in the way we pray at home, or join in a prayer meeting, or even praying out loud in a prayer meeting, or reading the lesson in church or leading intersessions. It may be talking to a neighbour about what difference your faith has made to the way you are surviving this lockdown. It may be the way you use your money to sponsor Gospel work. It could be trusting the Lord to deal with a problem in your life, handing it over to Him and accepting the outcome no matter what. Or it could be trusting in a Christian approach of grace and forgiveness without recourse to worldly ways, to get what you want.

Each time we step out, it is like Peter stepping out of the boat and trusting in our Lord. And each time we do it, then we learn to trust him that little bit more, and a bit more, and before we know it, it becomes second nature to us, and we are running and jumping and living more fully without fear, in the service of the Lord. This is part of what it means to mature as a Christian.

So, in answer to the opening question: “Have you ever thought about how big your faith needs to be for it to be acceptable to God?” It can be as small as a mustard seed, taking Jesus’ parable from a few weeks ago. He was talking about the Kingdom of Heaven being like a tiny Mustard seed growing to be a substantial tree. We, as Christ’s followers, are part of the Kingdom of Heaven and our faith may start off small, but that is not the point.

It is about having faith, and the rest is about learning to trust in that faith in Jesus.

There was a very famous missionary called Hudson Taylor, who took the Christian message to China in the eighteen hundreds. Over his 52 years in ministry, an astonishing 18,000 Chinese Christians were baptised. Regarding faith he said: “Not a great faith we need, but faith in a great God.”

It is not about US, it is all about HIM – the great “I AM”.

And as the disciples grew in faith and saw Jesus more clearly before them, they worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

May each of us learn to walk more steadily in our faith, as we learn to trust our Lord Jesus more and more, each day.

Amen.