

Matthew 14:22-33 Jesus walks on water

**Sometimes perhaps we need to realise - it
Jesus' job to walk on water, not ours!**

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus takes possibly the shortest retreat or holiday on record. If we assume he dismisses the now well-fed five thousand and his chastened disciples sometime before the speedy fall of a mediterranean dusk, and walks out on a turbulent sea to find their boat at dawn, it was approximately 12 hours. Enough time to shake off the clammer of the crowd, to feed his inner introvert, to rest his body and mind, to talk quietly with his Father. After all, the writing was on the wall, he was going to be ministering to massive crowds for the foreseeable future, people demanding he pour out his healing presence and his wisdom, whilst the authorities find an excuse to silence him permanently.

For anyone feeling overwhelmed by people's expectations of them, the demands of work or family, or anticipating a long period of either or both, cutting yourself off for a few hours, or days, without means of getting back to family, friends or colleagues is not just a good thing, it is a vital

necessity. It rejuvenates and energises and sometimes expands our future capabilities, or perhaps more often, makes us more realistic about what those capabilities are. But I've talked about that before!

What about the disciples in this story? The disciples have been pushed off in a boat onto choppy seas, to fend for themselves - something they are far more capable of coping with, especially given the number of fishermen on board, than they are the sight of Jesus walking towards them through the dawn light. Their fear and superstitions take over. Dawn light can play tricks on the eyes and they had perhaps been awake for a considerable part of the night maintaining the boat's progress or at least stability, in a head-wind. We shouldn't be surprised at the exclamations of horror at the ghostly apparition walking toward them.

Peter did not have twelve hours of retreat, rest and restorative prayer behind him when he impulsively got out of the boat to see if he could emulate his teacher. As a fisherman and natural leader, in the boat with his colleagues he'd probably been playing to his strengths, using his God-given well-honed skills to keep them all afloat. But many fishermen are not confident

swimmers, and the ability to walk on water is not a known attribute of any human, so when the reality of the situation he's just walked into, or onto, really kicks in, no amount of divine guidance and support from his Master can override an overwhelming sinking feeling. Peter had only got out of the boat having checked that Jesus would be there for him, though he was after-all just a little bit of a show off, the first to try and show he'd understood what Jesus was trying to tell them!

When Jesus accuses Peter of having little faith, there could in fact be a couple of teaching points. Many of us know the most obvious; Peter had only stepped out of the boat with Jesus' encouragement. He and we need to realise that when we metaphorically do this, we need to keep our focus very firmly fixed on Jesus, if we dare to go it alone when a storm surrounds us. But it may be that he's only supporting us in this so that we don't drown, and are therefore both still alive and better equipped in the future to focus on what it is we are actually called to attempt and achieve in our lives.

Sometimes, we have to admit we were wrong to attempt something that was outside our skill set, grasp firmly on Jesus' forgiving hand, watch our

pride sink, and with him, get back in the boat. Jesus will always be there for us in these moments, making sure we aren't lost to the wind and waves, but as we return to the boat, dripping and repenting our rash actions, the important thing is that we are aware of God's presence now on board, just as he always intended it should be. Our God-given skills, combined with his presence in the one that has been sent to us, Jesus Christ our Lord, is what makes for a much calmer journey to the place where his ministry must take centre-stage, not our desire to copy him. Faith may involve seeing the boat for what it is; a shared experience with the opportunity to work collaboratively, waiting for the person God has sent to join the team and lead us into calmer waters.

It is Jesus' job to walk on water, not ours. Jesus is the Son of God, divinely equipped to feed, to heal, to calm troubled waters, to rescue us when we get ourselves into deep water. We aren't. We, like Peter have been called to be faithful disciples using our God-given skills, and when equipped by the presence of God through the Holy Spirit (as Peter would be with the rest of the disciples at Pentecost) to undertake difficult tasks, take risks and put ourselves in the way of tricky situations, so that the grace, love and

forgiveness offered in and through Jesus, can be brought to people's attention.

Our job as Jesus' disciples, is to reach out and place our hand firmly in Jesus' grasp. In doing so, not only will we have the safety and security of his presence with us, both individually and as a fellowship of Christians, but we will then also discover where he needs us to go, which shore we are called to land on, so that both his divinity and his humanity can be proclaimed in his love for all those who aren't currently in the boat with us.