

Thought for Sunday 20th September 2020

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Read Matthew 14:22-33

My plan had been to read through some of the miracles as listed in John's gospel, and whereas John does mention this incidence, as does Mark, neither Mark nor John mention the point at which Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water, albeit for just a short time. More of that in a bit. Matthew, Mark and John all have this story following on from when Jesus fed the five thousand, for some reason Luke has no mention of Jesus walking on the water of this sea. Our reading begins with Jesus telling his disciples to get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side of the lake. Jesus needed time alone with his Father, and the disciples needed time to come to terms with what they had witnessed. Five thousand people being fed with just five small barley loaves and two small fish, and then Jesus had sent them out to pick up what was left over, just 12 large baskets, full. Verse 24 tells us that; *'when evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.'* The disciples were used to these conditions, some of them were experienced fishermen and if you ask any seasoned fisherman what it is like fishing in a storm, they will tell you it is not an easy situation. I remember when I was in the merchant navy, I was on a large ship, 28,000 tons, a few days outside of Hong Kong and we caught a hurricane, Hurricane Jane, it was 1963, and the ship was tossed about like a cork. It was the only time I was sea sick, I wasn't afraid, just very, very sick, for several hours. One of my worse experience at sea. We're not told the disciples were sick, we're not told they were afraid of the sea, after all they knew the dangers and would have paid great respect to the sea. You may remember the story in Jonah 1:4-5; *'The Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god.'* The gospel writers don't tell us the disciples did that, but they did get into a panic when they first saw a figure walking on the lake. They thought it was an apparition, a ghost. I guess it was good training for the disciples, to see the unexpected. And they certainly did see the unexpected during their three years training with Jesus. For Jesus, walking on water wasn't a problem, after all he is the king of all creation, and nothing is impossible for him. The boat is being buffeted and they see Jesus, walking on the water. John's gospel tells us they had rowed three and a half miles when they saw Jesus approaching the boat. If the wind was buffeting them, it is possible that Jesus was walking faster than they could row. Mark's gospel says; *'He was about to pass by them.'* Mark's gospel says; *'he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.'* Only Matthew tells us that Peter says; *'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.'* You may remember two weeks ago Jesus said to the invalid by the pool at Bethesda; *'Do you want to get well?'* and the man made an excuse rather than saying yes; *'I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.'* Too often we can make excuses, and it is not unusual for people to say they are willing, but when push comes to shove, they don't do what they have said they are prepared to do. **Read Matthew 21:28-31** Peter opens his mouth and asks the question; *'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.'* Jesus responds; *'Come.'* Now Peter has to make the decision to do something that is humanly impossible. We're not told that

Peter hesitated, just that; *'Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.'* Let's forget what happened next and concentrate for a moment on what Peter actually did. Peter; *'got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.'* Peter actually walked on the water, because he took a step of faith I apologies if you have heard this story before, but many years ago I did a sketch at Copthorne Chapel with a lady by the name of Ella Jarvis. We both stood on the small platform at the front of the chapel with cardboard cut out beaks. Ella was mummy bird and I was baby bird. Ella was trying to get me to jump off this high building to take my first flight but I was having none of it, it is a long way down off a high building. As we all know, baby birds do have to take their first flight at some point or they will not do what comes naturally. In the same way, as Christians, we have to take steps of faith. We know verse 30 tells us; *'when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink,'* What the passage also tells us is that Peter cried out, *'Lord, save me!'* Peter knew who to call out to, and because Peter had done what Jesus had told him to do, to *'Come,'* Jesus was there with him and *'Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.'* That we can be assured of, Jesus will always answer our call, although not always in the way we may expect. Dear Peter is then scolded; *'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'* I would guess Jesus says that to us time and time again. We are then told, verse 32; *'when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'* One of the things we have read over these past few weeks is Jesus saying; *'unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.'* But to Thomas, in John 20:29 Jesus said; *'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'* Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and don't be afraid to step out of the boat, and don't be afraid to call out *'Lord, save me!'* This time of the year is when we celebrate the harvest, so I thought I should include a harvest hymn;

We plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand;
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all His love.*

He only is the Maker of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower, He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey Him, by Him the birds are fed;
Much more to us, His children, He gives our daily bread.

We thank Thee, then, O Father, for all things bright and good;
The seedtime and the harvest, our life, our health, our food.
No gifts have we to offer for all Thy love imparts,
But that which Thou desirest, our humble, thankful hearts.