

DSW Written Service
Sunday 13th August 2023

Gathering Prayers

Jesus said: 'Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.'
Our God is a powerful God,
who does things way beyond our understanding.
But we have no need to fear,
for we know we are safe in God's presence.
Let us come to our God now.
Let us bow down and worship. **Amen.**

Lord, sometimes life following you can be difficult.
We find so many dilemmas and struggle so much,
wishing it could be easier.
We so want to trust you and see your plan for
us. Help us today to relax into your presence, to
clearly hear your word and be prepared to act on
it. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

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Song [STF 65]

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.
*Come then, all you nations, sing of your Lord's
goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has
broken, new life he now gives to all.

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the
trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your
dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

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Can you remember a time when you did
something that seemed really scary for the first
time ever? What was it? How did it feel?
A couple of years ago I tried paddle-boarding on
the sea for the first time. It was quite scary,
especially when the waves got bigger! But I had
someone to help me and show me what to do –

it's good to have someone we can trust to help
us if we get into difficulty isn't it?

It's a bit like when we learn to swim or ride a
bike or drive. I did manage eventually to get my
balance & stand up on the board (before I fell off
again!) and it was a great feeling, even if it didn't
last for long, that first time! This week's gospel
reading is about a similar experience for Peter...

Reading: Matthew 14: 22–33 CEV

Right away, Jesus made his disciples get into a
boat and start back across the lake. But he stayed
until he had sent the crowds away. Then he went
up on a mountain where he could be alone and
pray. Later that evening, he was still there.

By this time the boat was a long way from the
shore. It was going against the wind and was
being tossed around by the waves. A little while
before morning, Jesus came walking on the water
toward his disciples. When they saw him, they
thought he was a ghost. They were terrified and
started screaming.

At once, Jesus said to them, "Don't worry! I am
Jesus. Don't be afraid."

Peter replied, "Lord, if it is really you, tell me to
come to you on the water."

"Come on!" Jesus said. Peter then got out of the
boat and started walking on the water toward
him.

But when Peter saw how strong the wind was, he
was afraid and started sinking. "Save me, Lord!"
he shouted. Right away, Jesus reached out his
hand. He helped Peter up and said, "You surely
don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?"

When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind
died down. The men in the boat worshiped Jesus
and said, "You really are the Son of God!"

Reflection

Talking with people inside and outside the
churches in our circuit, and beyond, recently,
there seems to be a real sense that God is doing
a new thing, that the Holy Spirit is at work,
opening hearts and minds to explore new ways of
listening for God's call to follow where he's
leading us.

Stepping out into the unknown is a big challenge
for most of us and this passage from Matthew's
gospel (which also appears in Mark's gospel) is a
favourite of mine because it played a part in my

journey towards ministry and learning to step out in faith with Jesus.

John Ortberg wrote a brilliant book called **“If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat”**¹ in which he shares some helpful insights into this story which I’ve found particularly helpful.

In his book Ortberg suggests that all of us have within us that same longing that Peter had to answer Jesus’ call to “come”, to step outside our comfort zone into the risky waters of faith and find Jesus meeting us in ways that will change our lives and our church.

He suggests that there are several characteristics we can see in this passage which can help us become water-walkers like Peter, whatever age we are. And I want to look at 3 of them.

The first is this: **Water walkers recognise God’s presence..**

Jesus goes to pray alone, having sent the disciples off in the boat across the sea of Galilee, & later that night when they’re part way across the lake, a storm blows in. It’s not just “a bit windy!” - depending which version you read, the boat is battered or buffeted by heavy waves & winds, so this is serious stuff!

And then, sometime around dawn, Jesus comes walking on water towards the boat. Just imagine that: the disciples are in the middle of the lake, away from the shore, trying to keep the boat afloat in the storm & waves, and then they see what looks like a ghost coming towards them on water- as if they weren’t already terrified enough! According to some scholars the verb used here for what Jesus was doing means something like “intending to pass by”- similar to the verb used in the Old Testament when God appeared to Moses & Elijah on the mountain and told them to stand there as he was going to pass by, to reveal his divine presence & power. Which suggests that Jesus is revealing his divine presence and power to his disciples.

So - the disciples got into boat because Jesus told them to and then the storm came. When we obey God it doesn’t mean we don’t have to face stormy times. But when we’re in the middle of the storm, Jesus is there with us. Yet the disciples don’t recognise Jesus, they think he’s a

ghost and they scream in fear and Jesus says: “Have courage, It’s me. Don’t be afraid!”

We don’t know how the other disciples in the boat responded when they heard that voice – maybe they were confused or amazed. But Peter recognises Jesus, even in this most unlikely place, walking on water to him. And somehow he realises this is an amazing opportunity for spiritual adventure & growth, even in the storm.

He’s about to become a water walker! Water walkers recognise God’s presence. How often are we in the thick of storms of life & we don’t recognise Jesus right there with us? Is that because we don’t expect or trust him to come to be with us where we are?

Secondly, Ortberg argues, **Water walkers can tell the difference between faith & foolishness.**

Peter says to Jesus “If it’s you Lord, command me to come to you on the water”. Why is this detail included in the story? Why didn’t Matthew just say “Peter got out of the boat & started trying to walk on water?” Perhaps because this story isn’t just about risk-taking, it’s about obedience. It’s teaching us how to tell the difference between something God’s calling us to do, & what could just be a foolish impulse on our part.

Courage & bravery on their own aren’t enough, we need to have wisdom & discernment, because just risk-taking or doing crazy things for the sake of it isn’t what Jesus is looking for. As John Ortberg suggests, this isn’t a story about extreme sports, it’s about extreme discipleship!

It’s about Peter *making sure that Jesus thinks it’s a good idea* before he gets out of the boat. So Peter asks for clarity – “if it’s you Lord, tell me to get out of the boat & come to you”. And Jesus says “Come on then!”

How might that apply to where we are, as Jesus’ followers, as his church, right now? What things might God be calling us to come and do with him right now? Things that take us beyond what we’ve experienced so far, as individuals or as a church community?

Thirdly, **Water walkers get out of the boat.** Let’s just remember the conditions here – this wasn’t a nice calm sunny day, this was a violent storm with crashing waves & a heavy sea & it’s

¹“If You Want To Walk On Water You’ve Got To Get Out Of The Boat” © 2001 John Ortberg, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

the early hours of the morning! Peter got a glimpse of Jesus passing by, inviting him on the adventure of his life - but surely at the same time he must have been scared to death? We would have been, wouldn't we?

Because even in a storm, the boat is safe (relatively) and secure and comfortable - but the water is rough & stormy & wet & cold! And if you get out of the boat, there's good chance you might sink. But if you don't get out of the boat, you will never walk on the water.

And if you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat!

John Ortberg says there's something inside each of us that tells us there's more to life than just sitting in the boat, and that's because we were made for more than just going through life avoiding failure. He argues that there's something inside each of us that wants to walk on the water, to leave behind the comfort & safety of routine existence, and abandon ourselves to the high adventure of following God in Jesus.

So the question is ...What is your "boat"?

Your boat is whatever represents safety & security to you, apart from God himself.

Your boat is whatever you're tempted to put your trust in, especially when life gets a bit stormy. It's whatever you don't want to give up, even when Jesus is calling you to join him on the waves...whatever pulls you away from extreme discipleship.

Ortberg gives some examples, like "David" whose "boat" is his vocation: he's been a builder for 35 years, is now in his 50s, and has always had a sense that God was calling him into ministry, but he avoided that by giving money away & doing other good things. But he can't shake off the fear that he's missed his calling.

Or Kathy, who's married well, raised her children, pursued a good career, all to make her dad proud. Nothing she does is enough to please him, but the thought of upsetting him terrifies her - so her "boat" is her need for her dad's approval.

Or Ralph, the minister of a church which is full of divisions, petty squabbles, back biting & gossip, so that instead of speaking God's truth prophetically and leading with clear vision, he has to spend time trying to placate angry worshippers & keep the peace. He doesn't particularly like his church,

but fears that if he leaves he'll only find another like it - so this church is his "boat".

For the rich young ruler it was his wealth & status: when Jesus asked him to get out of the boat by selling all he had, giving it to the poor & following Jesus, he decided not to, because his "boat" was nice & comfortable. I wonder if he ever wondered when he got older what his life might have looked like if he'd followed Jesus & risked all he had, to gain the kingdom of God?

Scripture shows us that God is constantly calling people to step out in faith and trust him: think of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Paul, Peter and the other disciples.

There's always fear - but God always reassures us of his presence.

There's always a decision to make - will we follow or will we not? Some people say yes, some say no, but their lives are changed by their response. Those who say "yes" to God aren't perfect and they often fail, but they learn and grow from their failures. Those who say "no" become more resistant to God's call and more likely to say no next time..

So for us the question is "what is your "boat"?" Is there be an area in your life where you feel you're shrinking back from fully trusting God? Where in your life might you feel afraid to get out of the boat when Jesus says "Come on then"? Usually our fears will tell us what our "boat" is. And leaving our boat when we hear the call of Jesus to come on, may be the hardest thing we ever do. But, if you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat....

Song [SOF 1063]

Though I feel afraid
Of territory unknown,
I know that I can say
That I do not stand alone.
For Jesus, You have promised
Your presence in my heart;
I cannot see the ending,
But it's here that I must start.

*And all I know is You have called me,
And that I will follow is all I can say.
I will go where You will send me,
And Your fire lights my way.*

What lies across the waves
May cause my heart to fear;
Will I survive the day,
Must I leave what's known and dear?

A ship that's in the harbour
Is still and safe from harm,
But it was not built to be there,
It was made for wind and storm.

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Prayers:

Lord God,
I'm sorry for the times I take my eyes off you,
and seek to do things in my own strength.
I'm sorry for the times I doubt that
you can keep me on the straight and narrow.
I'm sorry for the times I ask you for signs.
Lord, I pray that you will forgive my doubts and
hesitations, show me your loving presence,
especially when I most need it,
and teach me to trust you at all times. **Amen.**

God of the earth and the waves,
we praise you that you more than meet all our
needs. You call us out from our security
to experience your adventures and blessings.
You don't want us to be like a becalmed ship,
or stuck in the harbour.
You want us out in deep water – and you'll be
with us.
O Lord my God, you are worthy to be praised.
You are the Son of God who walks on water,
who mesmerises huge crowds with powerful
words, but who also calms a frightened Peter –
and you calm me and give me peace.
Thank you, Lord. **Amen.**

Lord God, we pray for all those people for whom
taking risks is a way of life.
We pray for our emergency services, paramedics,
the police, the fire service, for security forces and
diplomats and all who daily face difficult situations
as they seek to help to protect us and make our
world a safer and more peaceful place.
**Lord, fill them with your presence and keep
them safe.**

We pray for people who work in troubled areas,
the armed forces in war zones, those who bring
humanitarian aid into areas of natural disaster;
for all those who are suffering hunger, loss, pain,
lack of the basic necessities for life, and all who
seek to help them.
**Lord, fill them with your presence and keep
them safe.**

We pray for people who take risks in your name,;
those who take your word where it is most
needed, despite the danger that places them in;
for those who struggle with anxiety and pain of
every kind; for those who grapple with faith and

doubt; and for ourselves as we yearn to follow
where you lead us.

**Lord, fill all of us with your presence and keep
us all safe. Amen**

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The Lord's Prayer

Song [STF 662]

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart
been stirred? Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships
start, will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

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Sending out prayer

Peter only knew life as a fisherman, but he got
out of the boat and followed you, Lord.

Help us to hear your voice,
get out of our boats and follow you.

In the week ahead, may the world and its
problems decrease, as you increase in our lives.

Keep us focused on your way,
looking ahead and trusting you.

Lord Jesus, as we go out from here,
help us to step out in faith,

remembering who we walk with,

knowing that you have authority over all.

Amen.

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Rev Jane Wilson, Aug 2023