

DSW Written Service
Sunday 9th August 2026

Gathering Prayer

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.

**God of wind and waves,
thank you that you meet us
when we are sure of our faith
when we are battling our doubts
wherever we are today. Amen.**

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Song [STF 18]

Be still and know that I am God,
Be still and know that I am God,
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals,
I am the Lord who saves and heals,
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust,
In you, O Lord, I put my trust,
In you, O Lord, I put my trust. *Author Unknown*

Reading: Matthew 14: 22–33 (NLT)

Jesus Walks on Water

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water." "Yes, come," Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Jesus immediately reached out and

grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. Then the disciples worshiped him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Reflection

This gospel story occurs at a time where the disciples are pretty scared by the sight of what's happening around them: the heavy seas have been stirred up by the storm while they're out in the middle of the lake, and then along comes Jesus, looking like a ghost, which scares them even more! And then Peter recognises Jesus and calls out to him – "Lord, if that's you, call to me and tell me to walk on water!"

Many of us have faced and will face times in life where we feel overwhelmed and frightened by the "storms" of life and where we might wonder where Jesus (who promised to be with us always) is? And we might wonder whether, when we realise he is with us, we would ever react as Peter did to that realisation and step out of our "boat" to get nearer to him!

In his book "***If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat***", Christian writer John Ortberg offers some insights into the characteristics that make someone a "water walker" like Peter, and how that might help us to look at things differently. Here are 3 of them.

Firstly, ***Water walkers expect problems but see fear as the price of growth.***

When Jesus says "Come on then!", Peter goes to the side of the boat, grips the edges, & puts a foot over the side. It's worth remembering here that Peter is a seasoned fisherman who knows the power of the sea! And then he puts his other foot over, still holding on, and – as Ortberg puts it – Peter then "does something religious" – he lets go! He abandons himself utterly to the power of Jesus, & suddenly, for the first time in history, an ordinary human being is walking on water!

I wonder how must that have felt for Peter as he walked forwards, looking towards his master Jesus?

Then in verse 30, Peter saw the wind and the waves, and reality sets in! He probably thought "what was I thinking of?" He realises he's out on the water in the middle of a storm, with no

boat beneath him, & understandably he's terrified. In one sense nothing's changed - the storm was there all along after all – but what has changed is that Peter has switched his attention from Jesus to the storm.

And we know what it feels like to see the wind & the waves don't we? We know how it feels to start out on a new adventure – a new school or job, a new relationship, a new venture, a new chapter in our faith journey. And we know that often when we try something new, we will meet setbacks & obstacles, we'll see the wind & the waves, and we may get scared.

Peter got scared, & he began to sink, so he shouted to Jesus to save him - and Jesus does.

When we choose to get out of the boat & follow Jesus, it's pretty certain that we're going to feel afraid. In fact every time we have a go at "water-walking", metaphorically, in our lives, we're going to feel fear, precisely because (as Ortberg reminds us), if you want to grow it will involve taking on new challenges & going into new territory, and that's scary - but it is how we grow.

John Ortberg suggests that millions of people in churches are what he calls "pew potatoes" because they want the comfort of spirituality & church fellowship, but they don't want the risk and the challenge that go along with following Jesus. But, he suggests, Jesus is still looking for people who will get out of the boat.

Risk and comfort are habit-forming. Every time we choose comfort over following Jesus, the call gets a little quieter in us. Conversely, every time we get out of the boat & take a risk, we become a little more likely to get out of it next time the call comes..

The fear doesn't go away, but we get used to living with it, & we realise that fear doesn't have the power to destroy us.

Secondly, ***Water walkers see failure as an opportunity to grow.***

When he saw the wind & the waves Peter began to sink. So here's a question: Did Peter fail? Perhaps that depends on how you view failure.

Jonas Salk invented the polio vaccine but before he found one that finally worked, he tried 200 unsuccessful ones. When someone asked him how it felt to fail 200 times, he said "I didn't fail

200 times. I was taught not to use the word failure. I just discovered 200 ways how not to vaccinate against polio."

Someone asked Winston Churchill what made him risk political suicide by speaking out against Hitler when everyone else was working towards appeasement in the mid-1930s.

(Churchill later went on to lead Britain against Nazi Germany). He replied that it was the time he had to repeat a year in elementary school.

"You mean you failed a year in school?" he was asked. He replied "I never failed anything in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right!."

In a way Peter did fail because he took his eyes off Jesus & started to sink. But as Ortberg points out, you could say there were 11 bigger failures who were still sitting in the boat, they just failed quietly & privately, and not in public, like Peter.

But Peter discovered two things they didn't. Firstly, the glory of walking on the water – doing something he couldn't possibly do in his own strength, & feeling the wonder & joy of being empowered by God to do it. Surely once you walk on water you never forget it.

And secondly, the glory of being lifted up by Jesus in his moment of need. He knew that when he sank, Jesus could save him, & in that moment his trust in Jesus was fulfilled. As soon as Peter asked for help, Jesus was there, pulling him up from the waves. But Jesus also helps Peter to learn from what happened, when he says "Why did you have so little faith? Why did you doubt me?"

The lovely touch here is that Jesus says that to Peter before they get back into the boat.

Maybe he didn't want to embarrass Peter. But he did want Peter to know that whether he sank or walked on water depended on whether he focused on the storm or on Jesus. He wanted Peter to understand the importance of having faith.

Failure isn't what shapes us, how we respond to failure is what shapes us.

Sir Edmund Hillary made several unsuccessful attempts to climb Mount Everest before finally succeeding. Apparently after one attempt he stood at the base of the mountain, shook his fist at it & said "I'll defeat you yet! Because

you're as big as you're going to get, but I'm still growing!"

Perhaps the worst failure is not to get out of the boat & sink, but never to get out of the boat at all! We try & we fail, and we learn and we grow, and we try again, and one day we don't fail.

Thirdly, ***Water walking brings a deeper connection with God.***

So, if Jesus is still looking for people willing to get out of the boat, why should we risk that? Here are some suggestions from John Ortberg:

- It's the only way to really grow spiritually
- It's the way our faith develops
- It's the only alternative to the boredom & stagnation that makes us wither away spiritually
- It's part of discovering & obeying our calling

But the one he says trumps all the others is this: The water is where Jesus is. The main reason Peter got out of the boat was because he wanted to be where Jesus was.

When Peter got out of the boat, both he & his friends came to a greater understanding of who Jesus is: the one who's on the boat & who also walks the waves. And in verse v 31 they all worshipped him as the true Son of God.

So - when was the last time you or I got out of the boat?

We tend to seek a life of comfort, to build manageable lives with security & predictability, to maintain the illusion that we're in control. And then God passes us by and shakes everything up. Perhaps that's what God is doing to the church now – shaking everything up so that we can't carry on the way we used to! The call to get out of the boat usually involves crisis, and opportunity, often failure, generally fear, sometimes suffering - and always the calling to a task that is too big for us to do on our own. But Ortberg argues that there's no better way to grow our faith and partner with God.

Maybe there've been times in our lives when, like Peter, we've asked Jesus to tell us to come to him, & we've got out of the boat. Perhaps we've risked talking about our faith, even if it meant rejection, or giving, even if it meant

sacrifice, or serving, even if it meant risking failure.

Maybe we haven't been "out of the boat" for a long while. Maybe our boat is nicely kitted out with deck chairs and it feels too comfortable to want to get out of! But what if our Lord Jesus is passing by?

John Ortberg argues that Jesus is still looking for people who will get out of the boat.

And if – or when- we do that, there will be storms, there may even be failure, & our faith will not be perfect.

But two things will happen:

One is that when we fail – which we will sometimes – Jesus will be there to pick us up and save us.

And the second is that every once in a while we will walk on water.

So the invitation is this: let's all do something religious, like Peter - let's all "Get out of the boat!"

Song [STF 626]

Even though I walk through the valley
Of the shadow of death,
Your perfect love is casting out fear.
And even when I'm caught in the middle
Of the storm of this life,
I won't turn back; I know You are near.
And I will fear no evil,
For my God is with me.
And if my God is with me,
Whom then shall I fear?
Whom then shall I fear?

*Oh no, You never let go,
Through the calm and through the storm.
Oh no, You never let go,
In every high and every low.
Oh no, You never let go,
Lord, You never let go of me.*

And I can see a light that is coming
For the heart that holds on;
A glorious light beyond all compare.
And there will be an end to these troubles,
But until that day comes,
We'll live to know You here on the earth.
Yes, I can see a light that is coming
For the heart that holds on,
And there will be an end to these troubles,
But until that day comes,
Still I will praise You, still I will praise You.
(Repeat)

Prayers:

Lord Jesus,

We are sorry for the times we do not put our trust in you.

We are sorry that sometimes we focus on the problems in the deep water in front of us, instead of trusting you to keep us afloat.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to reach out to you, and trust you to reach out to us. **Amen.**

God, creator of all things: **You are God over all.**

God in our weakness: **You are God over all.**

God in our strength: **You are God over all.**

God in our doubt & fear: **You are God over all.**

Almighty God, Father, Son and Spirit... **You are God over all. Amen.**

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Loving, Living God

We pray for people whose lives seems stormy at this time...

for those stepping out into new and uncharted territory,

for those feeling afraid or anxious..

We remember ministers and their families moving to a new place and new churches this month;

We pray for those receiving exam results, trying to find places at college or university, those looking for work, trying to find their place in life;

those who find themselves out of work and worry about how they will pay their bills or look after their loved ones,

We pray for those battling with illness, and those who care for them, those who have lost loved ones, and those facing a future they did not anticipate or wish for;

We lift to you those for whom everyday life is a struggle to survive, where access to decent food, clean water, medication and a safe place to live is not their reality;

We lift to you those we know personally who are on our hearts this morning....

Bring your healing touch to all those in pain of whatever kind;

pour your peace and love into hearts that are anxious or fearful.

Fill us all with your Spirit's gifts of joy, hope, peace, faith and truth;

Give us courage to walk with you and work with you in transforming our world into a place where your kingdom values reign;

May all those we pray for know how precious they are to you;

Give us the courage of Peter to get out of whatever our boat may be, trusting that you are with us and will show us how to walk on water with you.

And as we look to you to lead us along the path of your choosing, wherever it may lead,

Help us to see each other through your eyes of love, and to be channels of your love and grace in all that we do speak and think.

We ask in Jesus' name, as we say

The Lord's Prayer

Song [STF 547]

Beyond these walls of worship
in the stress and joy of life,
can we offer you our bodies
as a living sacrifice?

Will we keep you at the centre
far beyond the Sunday call?

Will we turn to you,
be transformed by you;
Still declare you God of all?

Beyond these walls of worship,
in the times of work and rest,
will we display your love for all
when our faith's put to the test?
When the people that surround us
deny that you are there,
will we display our faith in you —
in life, in praise, in prayer?

Beyond these walls of worship
may your Spirit strengthen us
to make the whole of life our worship
as we witness to your love.
From this hour in your presence
send us out now to proclaim
that we'll live our life as a sacrifice
to the glory of your name.

Ian Worsfold (b. 1974) and Paul Wood (b. 1967)

Sending out prayer

Keep us close to you, Lord Jesus, and give us the strength and the courage to follow where you are leading us, into new territory and new ways of being, as we work with you to bring in your kingdom here on earth. **Amen**