

Dorset South and West Circuit

Service for Sunday 9th August 2020 by David Ninnim, Local Preacher

In our worship this morning we shall be thinking of the time the disciples were caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus walked on the water to meet them. Compare the ferocity of that night to the tranquility of your home this morning as we offer our worship.

AN OPENING PRAYER

Father, we come to you this morning in the certain knowledge that the door is always open and you will already be coming to meet us. We come in the midst of our joys and sorrows, with our victories and our defeats. We come knowing we shall be accepted. We come because you are the Lord and we come in gladness to offer you our thanks and praise. Amen

HYMN

Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!
The heavens are not too high, his praise may thither fly,
the earth is not too low, his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!
The church with psalms must shout, no door can keep them out;
but, above all, the heart must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing, my God and King!

George Herbert

A PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

Lord, we praise you for the way you can take the ordinary things and make them new. For the way you are able to take ordinary lives, lived by ordinary people, and fill them with meaning. We praise you for your promise of joy and your offer of peace that can utterly transform how we live and respond. We praise you for Jesus who walked a hard path through his life. For the way he shared in the hopes and fears of those around him. For the way he makes us aware of the demands of your love and for the way that his presence still breaks hardened hearts. We praise you for the way Christ touches and changes the whole of life. He opens our eyes to the wonder of your creation and our ears to the songs of your love.

And yet, despite all your goodness to us O Lord, there are times when, like lost sheep, we have strayed from your path, confident that we knew the way. Forgive us for the things we should have done, but have left undone - the acts of kindness we never found time for - the thoughtful word never spoken - the message of encouragement or concern never sent - the helpful deed never attempted. Forgive us for all the opportunities we have missed - the possibilities we never imagined and the gifts we never used - the sacrifices we never made and the commitment we never gave. Lord, we ask your forgiveness and help us to learn from Jesus that our lives speak not of ourselves, but of you.

We thank you that as Jesus met those disciples on the Sea of Galilee, in the same way, you are always with us. You have always been there and you always will be even when no one else wants to. Stay with us Lord and accept our praise, our confession and our thanks. Amen

BIBLE READING

Matthew 14: 22-33(NIV)

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

REFLECTION

In verse 25 of our Gospel reading we read "*Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them walking on the lake.*" It is one of those stories that seems unbelievable because we know from experience that people can't normally do that sort of thing. But miracles are not easy to understand. In fact, a lot of our faith makes little sense when you start to analyse it; the virgin birth, the empty tomb etc. And now we have a story of Jesus walking on water which, again, goes against everything we know and understand.

But Matthew, Mark and John all include this little story in their gospels so surely we can say with a reasonable degree of confidence that it must have happened as described even though it does seem to contradict the laws of nature. I suppose it's just possible that the story could have been embellished over time or even that there had been an optical illusion. In the storm, visibility must have been poor so perhaps the boat was nearer to the shore than the disciples had thought and Jesus was paddling in fairly shallow water. You may have yet another theory to put forward but who are we to question what did or did not actually occur that night? And does it matter what really happened? Who are we to sit at home this morning and speculate about what is possible or impossible for the Son of God? If we are not careful I think we will completely miss the point of the story if we concentrate on what may have happened rather than ask ourselves what it means.

Jesus had just fed five thousand people, another astonishing event which is difficult to understand. Now he wanted a time for quiet prayer so he told the disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him back to the other side of the lake. In his Bible commentary, William Barclay, calculates that it must have been

about 3 o'clock in the morning when Jesus looked from the hillside across the lake. The lake was only 4 miles across at that point and in the light of the moon it is quite likely that Jesus could have seen his disciples in the boat. The wind was growing fiercer and soon the disciples found themselves caught in a sudden storm. The boat was being battered and they were probably cold and frightened. As soon as Jesus saw his friends in trouble he put his own troubles to one side. The moment for prayer was past. The time for action had come. He forgot himself and went to the help of his friends in their moment of need.

And isn't that completely in line with our understanding of Jesus? To Jesus, the sight of human need had overtaken all other claims on his time. His friends needed him, so he must go. Those frightened men saw someone coming towards them across the water. They thought it was a ghost. But Jesus called out "*Courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.*" Can you imagine how reassured they must have been to hear Jesus' voice coming to them through the storm? And then Peter tries, unsuccessfully, to walk on the water towards Jesus. Jesus explains that Peter would not have started to sink in the waves if he had only had enough faith. Then they get into the boat and the storm dies down.

The early church later went through difficult times under Roman occupation and the early Christians must have felt just like those disciples being tossed about on the Sea of Galilee. A reminder of God's presence in times of trouble must have been so comforting for them. And the same message is there for us today. As for those frightened disciples, Jesus can seem a long way away especially during times like this Coronavirus pandemic. We may not recognise him through the storm and we may be surprised at the path he chooses to get to us. Yet nevertheless, the assurance is there for us too in the words Jesus spoke to his disciples "*Courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.*" Like Peter, we must have faith. We can be absolutely sure that Jesus is never far away and he will come through the storm to comfort us and care for us. And do you know what? We needn't concern ourselves with how Christ manages to get to us. The important thing is that he does and it is always with outstretched arms and a comforting calmness in his voice. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord, we pray for all those who are in need of healing at this time and we think of those known personally to us. For those who are trying to come to terms with a terminal illness and for those who are trying to give them the support they need. We pray for all those who are grieving for the loss of loved ones. May the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit hold them and make them whole.

Lord, we pray for those imprisoned in a cycle of hunger and who have no idea where their next meal is coming from. We pray for those who are filled with despair because they are powerless to help their dying children. May the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit show us ways in which we can help provide for them.

We pray for those who care for others; For doctors, nurses and all those who work in the health service; For those who offer care in the community; either professionally or as a caring neighbour; For those who give little thought for their own comfort and security for the sake of those who have no one to care for

them; May the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit fill them with grace and be a source of strength for them.

We think of all those affected by war or civil unrest. For those whose lives are broken by violence or filled with despair through lack of compassion; For those who are facing unemployment and serious financial problems in these difficult times. May the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit be their beacon of hope

And finally, in the tranquility of our home let us pray for ourselves as we bring to Jesus Christ all that is happening in our lives and lay at the foot of His cross anything that is troubling us this morning. May the presence of Christ and the power of the Spirit guide and strengthen us as we seek to serve him in the days that lie ahead. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

HYMN

We end with a beautiful hymn which reminds us of God's continuing presence with us in exactly the same way he was with the disciples on that night in Galilee.

In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear,
And safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?

2 Wherever He may guide me, no want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me, and nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh, his sight is never dim,
He knows the way He taketh, and I will walk with Him.

3 Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me, where the dark clouds have been.
My hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free,
My Saviour has my treasure, and He will walk with me.

Anna Laetitia Waring

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we have come to you, to seek your help, to offer our worship and to declare our faith. Now we go for you, to work for your kingdom to proclaim your love and to share your gospel. Go with us and grant us grace to serve you as you have served us.

Amen