

Sunday 27th June 2021
Matthew 14:22-33
Rev.Scott Burton
Brightons Parish Church

Let us come to God in prayer before we delve into His word, let us pray:

Come Holy Spirit, soften our hearts to the word of God.

Come Holy Spirit, help us to follow after Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name, Amen.

One of the many privileges of ministry is to be asked to conduct someone's funeral and particularly to write a eulogy, because, someone in my position may not even know the individual all that well and yet, we are given the opportunity and the responsibility to recall and honor another's life. Often, in a person's life, there'll be many seasons, highs and lows, and in the writing this eulogy we're not simply seeking to recount a chronological series of events, rather, we're trying to tell a story, we're trying to tell something of their journey, a very personal journey which has touched upon the lives of other people. The life of faith is also often described as a journey, as a journey of following after Jesus with its own highs and lows, its twists and turns as we go to and fro, and one of my privileges in the past year has been to facilitate the telling of people's journeys of faith through our Testimony Tuesday evenings. If you've not listened to these I heartily encourage you to do so. Look them up on our Youtube Channel or, if you don't have access to the internet, then please ask for a CD or DVD copy. We'd love to facilitate that for you, because these stories of faith, these testimonies and following after Jesus, were so moving and powerful. Many a time these stories were quite normal, not everyone had a great crisis that brought about a renewed faith or something changed in their life, but each person did have a story to tell because being a Christian is to follow Jesus and if we are following the living Jesus then we should have a story to tell as well.

A story about how your faith in Jesus makes a difference to your everyday life and, hopefully, through you, how it has impacted others as well. When the day comes that someone has the great opportunity, I'm sure to tell some of my story I hope it's a story where Jesus and following Jesus is clearly seen and told. So, if I was to pause right now and ask you to think over your life, to think over the many years maybe that you've been a Christian and I was to be asked to write your story, I wonder how much would your story of faith feature?

Would your family, would your friends have stories to tell about how Jesus made a difference to your character? How you following Jesus how the call or teaching of Jesus got you involved in something, got you to start something, maybe got you to stop something maybe, would they be able to say that you had such a close and personal relationship with Jesus that we remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus.

What does your story of faith say of you? How is following Jesus seen in your life?

Our gospel story today is a story of faith, it's a story of following after Jesus and it's also a story of Jesus, and it's not so much about faith and following Jesus and the general

storms of life that many of us will be able to resonate with, rather it's much more a story of risky faith that gets you into a bit of a tricky situation.

We know from our reading that the disciples are instructed by Jesus to get into that boat and to grow across that lake and as they're going they experience one of those great storms that was quite common in that area, as they crossed the water and they struggle against the wind and the waves for several hours until something happens, until something they'd never expected to see happens, until something that was outside of anything they'd experienced before - here came Jesus walking on the water and it's understandable that at first they think it's a ghost, like, if you saw that when you're on your holiday over the summer, I'm pretty sure you'd be thinking it was a ghost or something strange, but with only a few words Jesus reassures them that it is Him. Though, for some reason, he doesn't seem very eager to get in the boat initially and then for some other inexplicable reason Peter gets this idea to say to Jesus "Lord if it's you, call me out." and for an unknown period of time he gets to walk on the water with Jesus.

I wonder when Peter asked that question when he said Lord if it's you tell me to come to you on the water what do you think the other disciples were saying to Peter at that point

might they have said Peter you're crazy man don't be silly don't risk it or maybe they said Peter that's not possible you're only you don't bother don't risk it bother I wonder if those are words or thoughts that you have had in your own journey of faith maybe someone said them to you maybe you've thought them yourself don't risk it don't bother I wonder friends has there been times when Jesus has called you to take a step of faith and we've allowed these words to dissuade us from following him don't risk it don't bother maybe even just now the Lord is calling you to do something that you thought is just crazy maybe he's telling you to take a step of faith and get involved in some way in our church family doing an area of ministry you think there's no way I can do that or to become a member and take that step of faith to publicly say I believe in Jesus and this is my church family and I'm proud to admit that maybe it's to give up a sinful habit that you think there's no way I can do that maybe it's to share something of your faith and invite people to come to church a friend a family member part of elaine's story is stepping out in faith I'm sure you probably never thought the praise group would end up in the places that it went but you stepped out in faith you followed the call of Jesus maybe Jesus has something planned that would be incredible in your faith journey would be incredible testimony of what can happen when we step out in faith and you now face a choice

do you listen to Jesus or do they listen to the voices that say don't risk it don't bother now I hope and pray that we will take those risks that we will take that step of faith and maybe also I pray that through that something incredible will happen in your life something incredible might happen through you even for the benefit of someone else but do you know what often when we take those steps of faith it goes well for a while like with Peter but something happens something happens in Peter's experience he takes his eyes off of Jesus and then he sees the wind and the waves and they start to

just overwhelm him he starts to get fearful he starts to sink more often than we like more often than we like following Jesus can get us into situations where we feel overwhelmed where we feel vulnerable where we feel scared maybe even threatened and I wonder if you have taken a step of faith sometime and it hasn't worked out like you planned or I wonder if you're thinking of taking a step of faith just now and you worry something will go wrong you worry that the voices are right don't risk it don't bother

most often when we read the story of Peter we focus very much on the stuff he does wrong and we'll get to that but there's also something he did right at that point in the story something we can learn from he called out to Jesus before he was in over his head I was listening to a sermon last weekend because well what did I listen to so I listened to someone else since uh I'm preaching each week and I was listening to a friend uh one of my friends uh trained with in ministry Lindsay who's the minister down in Dundonald on the west coast uh south of here and she was saying that in hard times we might say when the wind and the waves are buffeting us it can be easy to allow these situations to undermine our faith these situations can make us try to go alone we maybe withdraw from our church family we maybe try to do it in our own strength we maybe try we even try and withdraw from God we just turn away from God we stop praying we stalk reaching out to him and as we do that we sink further and further down but not Peter not Peter sure he takes his eyes off Jesus and as I say we'll come to that but he calls out to Jesus he has faith and a faith that is more than a faith for the good times and more than a faith that is just following Jesus when life is exciting and often in our day and in western culture if life isn't going well and Jesus isn't ticking all your boxes then apparently he can't be very loving really is that faith is that was just turning Jesus into a genie Peter has faith and so he calls out to Jesus and in doing that he finds that Jesus is right there in the storm with him he finds that Jesus is able to save to pick him up amidst the storms because let's remember they're in that storm because of Jesus let's remember Peter's experiencing those waves because Jesus said come you might say it's Jesus fault in some ways they are where they are meant to be and Jesus is right there with them and he's ready to save

friends I wonder if storms have come in your life they've come upon your journey of faith and in the midst of those storms and waves did you call out to Jesus did you call out before the water was over your head or did we try to go alone did we allow faith to wither did we allow hurt and bitterness genuine heart maybe to have their way and drive a wedge between us and God

you know even if we did even if that was the case it's not too late it is not too late the water can be right over your head but Jesus can pick you up and he can bring you into his embrace that you might have life that you might have peace that you might have renewed faith let us not allow faith to wither nor simply rely on our own internal strength let us learn from Peter's experience from his story and call upon the name of Jesus both in the storms and in the everyday moments of life I said near the start that this is a story about following Jesus but it is also a story about Jesus himself and you know every one of our stories includes that too when you tell your face story you're not just telling about your life you're telling about the Jesus you follow

and the same is true here sure we get lessons about what it means to follow Jesus about having a risky faith or how to respond when we start to sink but we also get revelation about Jesus

in part we have this story because of of an event that happens beforehand and it's made clearer for us in the gospel of john there we read after the people saw the sign Jesus performed they began to say surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world Jesus knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force withdrew again to a mountain by himself the sign referred to here is the feeding of the five thousand and in both Matthew's gospel and john's gospel the feeling of the 5000 comes before this experience in the storm and before Jesus goes up the mountain Jesus goes up the mountain Jesus sends his disciples away because the people want to make him king they want to have him rule them rather than the puppet king that roman stopped but Jesus doesn't want that and so he goes up the mountain he sends the disciples away they might see him as a man they might see him as a prophet but they don't realize there's so much more to Jesus Christian writer Max Lucado imagined what a journal entry might be like might have been like if one of the disciples straight after they got to shore had written down their experience and he describes it like this

i had never seen Jesus as I saw him then had seen him as powerful I had seen him as wise I had witnessed his authority and marveled at his abilities but what I witnessed last night I know I'll never forget I saw God the God who can't sit still when the storm is too strong the God who lets me get frightened enough to need him and then comes close enough for me to see him the God who uses my storms as his path to come to me I saw God it took a storm for me to see him but I saw him and I'll never be the same

maybe before the experience on the lake the disciples were just picturing Jesus as a man a prophet a wise teacher able to do a few miracles but after their experience on the lake they think very differently of Jesus the fir this is the first time they worship him this is the first time they say truly you are the son of God and surely don't understand that phrase fully they have a lot to learn they've got assumptions on to undo but they start to see that Jesus is more than a man he's more than merely a human king and ultimately it is this revelation that should prompt us towards a risky faith this revelation should prompt us to call upon Jesus amidst the storms and the waves he is God he alone is God and you know Jesus rebuke of Peter is not so much about the quantity of Peter's faith though that's what comes across an English translation rather faith is a consistency of trust in whom Jesus is faith is a consistency of trust in whom Jesus is and we know that because of what we read in James where doubt is to be divided into and so you you move from doubt to faith not by adding more to faith so that faith is somehow heavier than your doubt rather doubt diminishes as you become less divided in your thinking about who Jesus is who Jesus is and so we develop from that a more consistent trust a more consistent faith in Jesus so I wonder friends what is your perception of Jesus what is your perception of Jesus

to nurture a confidence that he is God you need to be in his word you need to be praying you need to be worshipping seven days a week not just today can I ask are you doing that are you facilitating that

you might do it as you jog or walk the dog you might do it in a quiet room you might do it at the end of the day the start of the day it doesn't actually matter but are you doing it because even if Jesus who had the most important job and the greatest demands and the busiest schedule and a family to look after because remember he doesn't have a dad he's the head of the family if even Jesus with all of this if even he had to go up a mountain and be with the father so that he would be more clear about who he was and the mission he was called to and that he might persevere under the greatest of challenges and temptations if even Jesus had to go with to be with the father and reconnect how much more how much more church do we need that to connect with God to connect with Jesus you won't get through the storms without being with Jesus so can I encourage you to do that and it's only by connecting with Jesus and being sure of Jesus that you will have a story to tell a story to tell to the generations you know Wednesday I went and visited Elwyn and that first verse I shared from first Thessalonians I read with Elwyn because our brother has a story to tell he will be remembered not just because he's a great guy he will be remembered because he has a faith in Jesus which has changed the world it has changed lives

can we say that can we say that you will only be able people will only be able to say that if you know Jesus if you spend time with Jesus and allow Jesus to lead you into the risky places of faith

as I said this summer, we are starting a series on stories of power and parable and in the midst of it I hope we learn much more of Jesus and if we hear his call he's called to risky consistent faith even amidst the storms of life

let us pray

so brothers and sisters where's Jesus calling you to take a step of faith

or what are the storms you're facing and you need them to pick you up and hold you fast

or what's causing you to be double minded to be split into to doubt that he's God

in the stillness why don't you just take a moment to share that with them in any of these three areas

Lord Jesus

I pray for those you're calling to step out in faith just now

give us a boldness a holy boldness fill us with your spirit afresh that we'd risk it that we'd risk it all for you

Lord I pray for those in the storm those with the waves crashing upon them be their strength and stay be their peace and their rock see them through the storm file see them through the storm and Lord where we feel just out of kilter with you

where we struggle to reconcile that that you are God help us give wisdom and revelation I pray

nurture our faith and lead us to that point where we know with confidence we know with clarity we know with clear consistency of faith that you are God you're here and nothing, nothing in all creation can separate us from your love

We ask this in your name, Amen.