

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
13/08/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28	Joseph hated and sold as a slave
Psalms 105: 1-6, 16-22	Give thanks to God, Joseph's Story
Romans 10: 4-15	Through belief in Jesus we are saved This must be proclaimed
Matthew 14: 22-36	Jesus walks on Water Peter does too, but falls and is saved

Introduction

Today in the Gospel reading we hear of the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. We also hear of how Peter also walks on water, and of how Jesus continues to heal when they reach their destination.

I'd like to look at Jesus' miracle in detail this morning, but I'd also like to look at the part of the reading that comes just before the miracle, where Jesus goes up a mountain by himself to pray.

Jesus Alone

Throughout Matthew's Gospel we hear how Jesus goes off to be alone. Last week in the Gospel we heard how he actually took a boat to try to escape the crowds. Today he takes off up a mountain.

We hear of Jesus going off alone, and he was in a physical sense, but not in a spiritual sense. He was going off to pray, to actually be with God the Father. Because this is mentioned so often in the gospels, it seems to me that this was a practice Jesus felt was very necessary for him to carry out his ministry, otherwise why would he be so persistent about doing it. And if it was important for Jesus to take time out alone to pray, to be with God the Father, then how much more important might it be for us to do so.

We need to take time out for ourselves to be with God. Sometimes very active people think it is a waste of time to not really be doing anything, but this could not be further from the truth. At a conference I attended in Brisbane one of the speakers talked about how the brain is most active when it is in a meditative state. It is when we are in a meditative or prayerful state that our minds can do their best work. It is at this time when our best ideas or plans can develop. The best selling book "To busy not to pray", hits the nail right on the head. The busier we are, the more we need to take time to be in tune with God.

It's very important for our spiritual lives that we develop regular prayer time. This will differ for different people, as we are all individuals, but we need to set aside time to be with God. Morning people might pray best in the morning, whereas

others might pray better as they are going to bed at night. A mother with a small child might find it difficult to get any time to herself. Her best chance might be during the middle of the day.

Taking time out for ourselves to be with God is a good and important thing, but we must be careful not to be so inwardly focused that we avoid all else. We live in a society which is very self centered. I was watching one of the kids shows on TV the other afternoon and the presenter was telling the kids how important it was to have "me time". Time you just devote to yourself. He went through a list of do's and don'ts to ensure quality "me time". I must say I found this a little bit disturbing. I think it is good to have "me time". But for what purpose. I recall being at a school fair once where I saw some disturbingly self centered actions by both children and parents alike. Pushing in, in lines for rides and other actions which showed no regard for others at all.

Yes, Jesus did take time out to be alone, but it was to refresh himself so he could re-engage in ministry. Jesus came out of these solitary times and went into action. Today we've heard a classic example of this where Jesus comes from prayer and walks on water to confirm his divinity.

So, taking time out for ourselves, is a good thing to do. It is good to get rest and recreation so we can take care of ourselves.

Taking time out though, should normally be so that we can better live out our lives, as followers of Jesus. When we take time out, we shouldn't be driven by mere selfish indulgence.

Jesus walks on Water

And now to the miracle of walking on water.

There is a lot of symbolism in this miracle, but the main theme here is of Jesus confirming his divinity to the disciples.

In chapter 8 of Matthew's Gospel when Jesus calms the storm the disciples say, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Today after he walks on the water they worship him and say, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Let's now go through the story.

When Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, he told them not to be afraid: But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying "It is a ghost" And they cried out in fear. In this time of great anxieties, the disciples identified a ghost, rather than a Saviour, coming to meet them. Surrounded by waves of trouble do we fear the worst, or expect the best? If the disciples had thought about all the things they had seen Jesus do, they could have accepted him walking on water. However, they were frightened – they didn't expect Jesus to come, and they weren't prepared for his help. It is part of our faith that we expect God to act in our lives. When we act on this expectation, we can overcome our fears. Jesus notices their concern: But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid".

Jesus is concerned for our welfare. By listening to him we will not become afraid of the circumstances surrounding our daily lives. Peter is quick to see that he can trust Jesus and can be guided by him.

In the presence of Jesus there is no need to be afraid of the storm. Peter answered Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said. "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. With encouragement from Jesus, Peter manages to walk on the water towards his Lord. He was the only one in the boat to react in faith. His impulsive request led him to experience a rather unusual demonstration of God's power.

But Peter stops listening to the voice of Jesus and sees and hears the storm, and the wind and the danger. He becomes afraid and sinks into the water. But when Peter notices the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out. "Lord save me" Peter's faith wavers when he realizes what he was doing. Peter cried out to the Lord to be saved.

We may not walk on water, but we do walk through difficult situations. If we focus on the waves of difficult circumstances around us without looking to Jesus for help, we may despair and sink. To maintain our faith when situations are difficult, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus and his power rather than on our own inadequacies. Why do we sometimes falter in our faith and doubt? How do we overcome a willingness to see? It involves a willingness to be open to the call of God in our lives. Faith is also responsive in its eagerness to go out to meet the challenge of God. Faith involves trust. Living in faith means that despite everything, we have enough courage to believe God's promises will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude by looking at this miracle in a slightly different way. Some scholars see the boat as a metaphor for the church and the wind and the waves as a metaphor for the hostile world.

I believe that looking after the boat is extremely important. We need nurture and encouragement. Even Jesus needed time out to pray. As Christians we need a place, we can feel secure in fellowship and worship. But we also need to be like Peter in following Jesus. We need to step out of the boat into the hostile world and share the message of Jesus with others.

Paul says in the Romans reading:-

"How can they hear without someone telling them."

There may be times when we think we are sinking, but if we focus on Jesus, if we rely solely on him, just like he did with Peter, he will stretch out his hand and pull us up.

Amen.