

Sunday 13th August 2023; Trinity 10 Benefice HC, Stonegrave,

“Lord, save me!” How many times I wonder have we echoed the words of Peter in our Gospel account today of the storm on the water. We all experience storms in our lives when it is so very easy for us to be overwhelmed. This is why when Jesus says “take heart” we must continually re-grab our heart when it’s been pulled from our chest out of fear or worry and re-align it to God’s care. That this is what Peter does as he’s sinking: he cries out, “Lord, save me!” Paradoxically, the storms of life can be a means of blessing. When things are going badly, our hearts are more receptive to Jesus. A torn heart is often a door through which Christ can find entry. He comes to us during our troubles, saying, “Cheer up! It is I! Don’t be afraid.” When he says, “It is I” the accurate translation is even more meaningful, he says, “I AM” – echoing the great self-declaration of God to Moses from the burning bush, and the seven references of Jesus to himself in the Gospel of John. Here in this account, by walking on water, and calming the waves, Jesus demonstrates his Godly identity. Matthew has identified Jesus as Emmanuel—God with us and this story reinforces that role. At the time of the writing of this Gospel, Matthew’s church is weathering a storm of persecution. The story of the disciples on the sea, therefore, mirrors exactly the situation of Matthew’s church. It holds a promise that Jesus comes to Christians during the storm—that the storm does not hold the upper hand—that Christ is present with us in the storm and redeems us from the storm, even when we think we lose faith, stop believing and are distracted by the winds.

In its largest context, it is the story of every Christian, you and I, as we move back and forth between doubt and faith—sometimes focused on the storm and sometimes focused on Jesus. This isn’t a story about Peter’s faith or lack of it. Jesus wasn’t asking Peter, “Why did you doubt your ability to walk on water?” He was asking, “Why did you doubt who I am?” When Peter got out of the boat, he got a lesson in trusting Jesus when he speaks. His little faith was

not in his ability, his little faith was in Jesus. This story is about Jesus, the Saviour. Jesus is the master of the waves that roll. What is required is not faith in your ability to walk on water, even if it is faith that God is going to help you walk on water. No, what is required is to cry out, "Lord, save me." For when you get tired of walking on the waves, when you can't keep your head above water and start sinking, Jesus will be there to lift you up.

When Jesus bid Peter to come to him he didn't calm the storm. Rather, he invited Peter out into the storm, into the rough seas. The rebuke of Peter's lack of faith was because he took his eyes off Jesus and instead focused on the storm. We think peace is found when the waves of life are calm, but Jesus never promised us smooth sailing. Instead, he promised always be with us. Peace is found in the presence of Jesus, even in the middle of a storm.

In his fear, there is only one place Peter turns. It isn't back to the boat and the other disciples; it is to the one who is "I am." It is to Jesus, who is with him in the stormy sea. Jesus is right there during the wind and the waves and the pouring rain, he can immediately take Peter by the hand, catch him, and hold him close and in that moment his fear is confronted by God and is laid down.

When it comes down to it, we are all people of little faith in relation to our infinite God. If we able to offer our doubts, to figure out why circumstances challenge our faith, how we are impacted by hardship and challenge, and doing so in conversation with the living God, we will ultimately grow our faith. When we do so honestly, we will find ourselves better equipped to face the same or even more challenging circumstances. Growing our faith this way may make it easier to keep Jesus's command to not be afraid, as Julian of Norwich famously said, "He said not, 'Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be dis-eased; but He said, 'Thou shalt not be overcome...that in falling and rising again, we are always kept in that same precious love.'"

The response of the disciples on the boat shows us this. At the end of the story the disciples got down on their knees, praised Jesus in the storm and said, “Truly, you are the Son of God.” And that is where we end our story as well—worshiping Jesus, the Saviour, the Son of God. He is the great I AM, who has authority over all. He is who He is wherever we might be in our lives as storms come and rage around us in all sorts of circumstances, but one thing is certain, when we cry out, ‘Lord save me’ He reaches out His hand and says, “Be not afraid, I am with you, I have never left your side.” Amen.