

## **11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2023 Matthew 14:22-36. Walking on water**

This morning's gospel continues on directly from last week. The disciples have just finished cleaning up after the great and compassionate feeding by Jesus of the 5,000 as distributed by the disciples, when today's passage begins.

I'd ask you to see it as all part of the same extraordinary twenty-four-hour period in the life of Jesus and today is part two of last week, where we saw that the great purpose of the miraculous feeding was to bring glory to the Father, (above all), feed the wandering and burdened lost sheep of Israel, and to teach his disciples.

The great purpose of God in today's miracle of walking on water remains to glorify God, but Jesus now does this by pressing in more and more in his depth of teaching to the disciples who are about to be the Church. So this is very much for us too!

Now I call this twenty-four-hour period 'extraordinary,' because from the moment in last week's reading when Jesus landed on the deserted shore to be met by a large crowd, to the end of today's reading, Jesus is absolutely radiant in miraculous power (the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water). The Kingdom of Heaven has invaded earth in all its glory and might.

Matthew brackets these deeds of great power by deeds of great compassion. This twenty—four-hour begins with Jesus healing the sick among those who meet him on the deserted shore, and it ends with people "begging him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed" (v.36).

Jesus shares the nature of God the Father, and it is the very nature of God's heart for true compassion to be the beginning and ending of all works of power. We too, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, share in the nature of God (we call this the fruit of the Spirit).

Jesus is modelling a behaviour for the disciples and for us (the Church). We too, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, can have the very compassion of Christ and when we relate to others from this Christ-like core in us, our Lord graciously allows us to witness great and mighty things. Without compassion, there are no miracles.

The reason Jesus left for the deserted shore in the first place was because he needed to spend time in prayer. He needs it even more now after the physical, emotional and spiritual pouring out of himself. So the disciples are sent off back to the other side of the lake in the boat, Jesus himself dismisses the sated crowd and finally goes up the mountainside to pray, and by evening he was absolutely alone with God.

We learnt in Matthew 8 that Lake Galilee has notoriously bad squalls blow up and the first time we hear of these squalls the disciples are terrified and Jesus calms the storm, and the sea becomes still (Matt 8:23-27).

Now our reading says: "When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake (23b-25).

So in the evening the boat was far from land and battered by wind and waves. Jesus doesn't come to them until "early in the morning," the literal translation of which is 'in the fourth watch of the night,' between 3:00 and 6:00 am.

All the lessons that the disciples learnt from the first miracle calming of the storm don't seem to apply now because Jesus isn't in the boat! So why does Jesus wait so long – from evening to at least 3am before coming to them?

Because he is in the throne room of God on a mountainside somewhere in Galilee. Not for his own welfare, but for God's perfect will to be done, and his Kingdom to come to earth this very day! As it does, in this extraordinary day in the life of Christ, and in the life of the Church.

The disciples are being taught that just because they can't see Jesus, it doesn't mean he isn't with them. They will need to get used to this, just as we the Church have had to.

Jesus is praying for them, and Jesus comes to them, so powerfully in a movement of God that Spirit and flesh become one and Jesus walks across the water to his disciples.

He then enables the beautiful trusting Peter to do the impossible, thereby enabling the whole future trusting Church to do the impossible and walk on the water to him (v.29).

But we must trust our Lord who alone controls the storms of life. Like Peter, our only other option is to sink into various forms of false comfort and security that too will blow away.

Jesus not only stills these storms, but always comes to us right in the middle of them, when we thought we couldn't see him anywhere.

In this intrusion of the Kingdom of Heaven into earth, Jesus was letting Peter share this victory parade, the victory over the storms of both life and death. Until he suddenly wonders what he is doing, takes his eyes off Jesus and sees how very big the waves really are, and begins to sink.

Peter now models perfect disciple behaviour. Our reading says, "and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (v.30). He did not wait until he was drowning. As soon as he felt himself sinking he cried out, and of course, "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him" (v.31a).

The disciples had seen great and miraculous things in a very short space of time, and when Jesus and Peter got back onto the boat the wind ceased and they worshipped Jesus, "saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (v. 33).

This particular miracle has great value to our parish and to the church. It shows a pattern of both faith and unbelief that I think, accurately reflects a similar pattern in our own lives. We are called to go to Jesus and direct our lives to the walk of faith.

But storms hit us, and fear fills us. We say, 'it would be alright if those waves just weren't so big!' Then we cry 'Help me, Jesus!' And his powerful right hand holds us until we are restored anew and once again, walk to our Lord.

And when we realise just how powerless in the face of the storm we are, and how powerful the mighty arms of Jesus are, we too are caused to worship and praise our Lord, saying 'truly you are the Son of God.'

Now this day is special in the gospels. Apart from the Passion, I don't think there is anywhere else in the gospel where the Kingdom of Heaven so dramatically implants itself on earth. God is indeed glorified this day and when they land back on the side they left from on the previous day, the news of the feeding has gone ahead of them and once more the crowd flocks to him.

On this extraordinary day, everyone who touched a crust of bread was fed, and anyone who touched even the fringe of his cloak was healed, and the beautiful disciple who simply touched Jesus hand was upheld.

Faith is touch, it is making contact with Jesus. Let me pray ...