

Sunday 30th August – Matthew 14:22-33: ‘Stepping out of the boat’

In 2011 the magician Dynamo performed one of his famous illusions by apparently walking on water across the River Thames, right next to Westminster Bridge. The trick was inspired by his experience of being bullied at school by kids who pushed his head under water because he couldn't swim.

Although Dynamo hasn't personally revealed the secret of how he did it, other such illusions have involved a large perspex plate placed under water. Part of the fun is in the guesswork, isn't it? He's certainly a remarkable performer if you've ever watched his TV shows.

But it reminds us of the enduring power of the story we've just read and watched. *This is one of those miracles that has entered our culture, and fired our imaginations.* For all that more than 50 miracles of healing are recorded in the gospels, ask a cross-section of people about Jesus' most famous miracles and I bet this one would be in the 2 or 3 they mention.

The point is really that Jesus' miracles demonstrate his authority over the four things humans have no ultimate control over: the supernatural, sickness, death and the forces of nature. Walking on water falls in the last of those categories, and it's no surprise that, at the end of our reading, the disciples worship him as the Son of God.

There's so much we could say about this famous story, but today let's focus briefly on the 3 things that Jesus says to his disciples. If we place ourselves in the boat, perhaps we can hear Jesus saying them to us as well:

The first thing Jesus says is: ‘Take courage.’ Jesus inspires us, and let's notice that the source of our courage is his very presence. ‘It is I.’ When the storms buffet our lives, when we seem to be rowing as hard as we can and making no progress, Jesus comes out to us and says: ‘Take courage – it is I.’ We are never alone. Jesus knows our situation, and he meets us where we are.

The second thing Jesus does is invite us. It's hard to interpret Peter's actions at this point. Is he trusting Jesus, or doubting him? ‘Lord, if it's you...’ But Jesus doesn't demand superhuman faith, just enough. He can take our conflicting emotions and invite us anyway – **‘Come.’** Come as you are. Come with your doubts. Come with the tests you want to throw at me. Come anyway.

Maybe that's a word for some of us today. To imagine ourselves facing Jesus, who looks at us through the storms and challenges of our lives, and simply says ‘come’.

What happens next is a beautiful picture of our faith and frailty, isn't it? It starts so well – Peter really does begin to walk on the water. But when he saw the wind... It's so like us, isn't it? We have moments of great faith, and then we see the problems, the challenges, the what ifs.... But Jesus is endlessly patient with us. He saves Peter, and I like to think that when he pulls him out the water he says what he says next with a gentle smile on his face, not a scowl of chastisement: ‘Why did you doubt?’

Jesus is with us every step of the way – in our successes, in our failures, and everything in between. He inspires us, he invites us, but then **he also inhabits the outcome**. Every lesson learned is an opportunity to grow.

Some of us are facing storms. But perhaps others of us are sensing Jesus call us out onto the waters, to a new challenge, to a deeper level of faith and trust. To something unknown, where feet may fail. The ending of this story reminds us that stepping out is not a do or die moment – whatever happens next, Jesus is with us in it.

So let's sit with this story awhile this week. And let's hear Jesus' words of inspiration and invitation: 'Take courage – it is I. Come.'

To give us time to reflect and respond we'll listen to a recent song which is all about this story. It's called 'Oceans' – and let's spend time listening to Jesus voice....