

Heavenly Father, help us to understand the Gospel today, and help us to identify with the disciples, and thereby to learn something of ourselves today. Amen.

Most people refer to this passage from Matthew's Gospel as "Jesus Walking on the Water". The time when God, the creator of the world, stepped outside of the ordinary - to walk on water. Well, God is all-powerful, all knowledgeable, so his walking on water, in a sense, is no big deal. *This passage is about something much bigger.* Let's look at it.

Immediately before this, Jesus had fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, - probably close to 15,000 in all. Jesus then ushered the disciples into a boat -with instruction to make for the other side. Then, he went back and sorted out the crowd. And then went up the mountain by himself, to pray.

The boat was soon "far from the land" -In fact, another account of this event, as told in versions of *John's* gospel, says they had sailed about 25 or 30 furlongs. Don't do the arithmetic! Jewish furlongs were about 7, 7½ perhaps, to the mile, so the distance they had sailed was approaching 4 miles. The Sea of Tiberias is never much more than 10 miles wide, so they were not-far-off the middle. About as far from the land as was possible.

And then, in the early morning, Jesus came. Walking towards them on the waves. When the disciples saw this, they were terrified. They cried out in fear! "It's a ghost", they said. Jesus reassured them and said "Do not be afraid. It is I." I'm so pleased to see that, even in a stressful situation, he was using the correct grammar! "It is I."

"Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on the water." "All right" said Jesus - "come!" Peter stepped out of boat, and onto the water. *What an incredible act of faith.* Joining Jesus in what he is doing is *an act of faith.* Joining Jesus, where he is, and doing what he is doing, are key components in being a faithful disciple.

Sometimes we see Peter as this impetuous man who never looks before he leaps. But on this occasion I feel that Peter was thinking pretty clearly. He saw what his Lord was doing, and he wanted to join him in it. For us, as Christians - as devoted disciples - the whole point is **not** to ask Jesus to get in the boat with us, but for us to **join** Jesus, in what **he** is doing.

Back to the story. Peter went over the side of the boat and **he walked on the water**, looking toward Jesus. They *were in* a very choppy sea, with high winds. And Peter felt the strong wind. He looked around at the high waves, And he was frightened.

At that moment, Peter did not trust the Lord fully, because Peter was afraid of the waves. Afraid of the storm. Afraid for his life. And in fear, Peter took his eyes off Jesus, ... and he began to sink. And instantly, Jesus reached out and caught him. "Where's your faith" Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

Life itself is rarely calm, is it? Life, for most people, is perhaps not a thunder-and-lightning storm, but is often a succession of heavy showers. Yes, life around us is often uncomfortable. Yet, Jesus does ask us to get out of the relative safety of the boat and to join him where he is, to join him in doing what he is doing, even though often it's likely to be a rough passage.

Do we have any golfers here today? In the early days of golf, the golf balls had smooth surfaces. Then it was discovered that after a ball had been roughened up a bit, it would go further. So then golf balls were manufactured with dimpled surfaces. So it is with life; it takes some rough happenings to give us the experience and the confidence to go further along the road.

Peter took his eyes off Jesus. Peter couldn't fix his sight *effectively* on more than one thing at a time - any more than we can. If we are immersed in on our own problems, we simply *cannot* focus on Jesus. So many things can lead to our **losing that focus**. Not letting Jesus into our lives ... *will do it*. Living only for the pleasures of the secular world ... *will do it*. Apathy ... *will certainly do it*.

In a convent school, the children were lined up for lunch. On the table was a large box of apples. On it was a prominent notice that said: "Take only ONE. God is watching."

Moving further along the line, at the other end of the table was a large plate of chocolate biscuits. This also had a notice, obviously in a child's handwriting. The notice said:

"Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

God **is** watching the apples, God **is** watching the chocolate biscuits, And God **is** watching you and me

There's another part of today's reading, that we need to examine.

Peter climbed out of the boat. *How come the other disciples ... didn't?*

Firstly, they were afraid. It was dark, and they were miles from land in a fierce storm. Secondly - they had doubts. They believed they had seen a ghost. No man had ever walked on water before, and they still did not realise that Jesus Christ was no ordinary man. Thirdly, they felt safer in the boat. That's not difficult to understand. Are we like those other disciples? Are we afraid to step out? Do we have doubts? Last, but not least, do we feel so *safe* - where we are - ...that we are unwilling to step out?

The boat (that we cling to for dear life) is our 'comfort zone'. *Our* boat – our *safe haven* – may be our house; our car; our job; our money; our position at work; our relationships; our church; our family; our friends; or *anything* that makes us *feel comfortable*. Any time we refuse to step out in faith to do a great work for the Lord - because we don't want to leave our comfort zone - we will miss out on a blessing that the Lord has for us.

If the other disciples wanted to get to Jesus as Peter did, they also had to step out of the boat. Likewise, in order for us to receive the blessings that God has for us, we must sometimes *step out of life's boat*. And *when* we step out, we can expect some storms, we can expect some problems, but we should not fear, we should not doubt, we should not be reluctant, *because Jesus' hand is stretched out to support us*.

The reading we heard from Romans 10 has a searching progression of questions, which is very pertinent to what we are examining in Matthew 14. It begins with a statement by St Paul: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved". *No problems with that!* And then it progresses to some questions, which include:

"How are they – how are we - to call on one in whom we do not believe?"

Our eyes need to be focussed, in faith, on Jesus.

and

"How are they *to believe* in one of whom they have never heard?"

We must proclaim Jesus, at every opportunity.

and:

"How are they *to hear* God, without someone to proclaim him?"

Someone has to do something . I am someone! You are someone!

When God, the creator of the world, The all-seeing, all-knowing God, stepped outside of what we call "the ordinary" to walk on water - *That was really no big deal*. For us mortals, the message for us today is all about Being True Disciples...

Now, that *is* big.