

Thought for the Week: 9th August 2020

Matthew 14: 22 – 33

²²Immediately after this, Jesus made his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake while he sent the people home. ²³Afterward he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. ²⁴Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves.

²⁵About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came to them, walking on the water. ²⁶When the disciples saw him, they screamed in terror, thinking he was a ghost. ²⁷But Jesus spoke to them at once. "It's all right," he said. "I am here! Don't be afraid."

²⁸Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on water."
²⁹"All right, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

³¹Instantly Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed him. "You don't have much faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?" ³²And when they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. ³³Then the disciples worshiped him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
2. In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.
3. O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!
4. With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.
5. Drop thy still dews of quietness,

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till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

6. Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

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Prayer (Hilary Creed, "Feasts and Festivals", Granary, 2017)

Lord, our loving Creator and our Father, you know each of us,
our ancestry, our background, our family, our friends.
You know our past and our future, the good that we do,
and the failings which we find so hard to acknowledge.

You know our complex situations, our intentions,
our emotions - even before we are aware of them.
You understand us better than we do ourselves.
As we put our trust in you, graciously accept us just as we are.
Weave our joyful and our dark days,
the hurts, successes and failures, into your over-ruling purposes.

Work through us, that others may see evidence of your kingdom,
indications of your generous love, available to all. Amen.

3am has never been my favourite time of the day. Fortunately, it usually passes me by unnoticed, but there are times when something wakes me (probably the cat), and I find myself surrounded by total darkness, which could be any time from midnight to just before the alarm, and the only way to know is to look at my watch and wake up properly. It takes a few moments to become aware of my surroundings, to identify the sounds on the edge of hearing, and for my eyes to adapt and find that the dark isn't total after all. I wonder if that was what it was like for the disciples, struggling in the boat, only aware of the wind and the waves and the effort ... until suddenly they glimpsed someone coming towards them. Perhaps that's why they were so scared – they hadn't had time to focus, to realise who it was, to drag their thoughts away from the struggle and the efforts they were having to make.

John and I are becoming more and more obsessed with Risk Assessments of various kinds as a necessary step to being able to reopen our churches and it can be hard to drag our thoughts from the nitty gritty (how to weigh a particular risk and what we can do to mitigate it) to think

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about what opening for worship is actually going to be like. I think one thing we can be fairly sure of is that it's going to be quite different.

Of course, it will be wonderful to see everyone again, to meet as God's people and share worship together, rather than through various media (internet, TV, radio, post), but the need for social distancing means that at first we may feel more like a collection of individual Christians than a worshipping community; the danger of the spread of the virus in small droplets means that we won't be able to sing, and no pipe organs are allowed either – or loud music, in case it encourages people to sing (who knew that singing was such a dangerous activity!). I suspect many of us are going to find it really difficult not being able to socialise afterwards (except outside, at a social distance), and we will have to get used to using hand sanitiser, being directed to our seats, and possibly wearing face masks so we won't even be able to share smiles.

We've been told to keep services short, to encourage all of us to space out our time of arrival rather than risk bunching up, and the pews will be marked with stickers to keep everyone at the safe distance (John and I have been measuring up, doing the maths, disagreeing and doing it all again!). There may have to be a one-way system so that we don't cross paths with each other; if we use hymn books it may be safer to ask people to take one away and bring back it each week, and the elements for Holy Communion will probably be set out in the seats in sealed containers.

John and I were over the border last weekend, at his sister and brother-in-law's Golden Wedding celebration at the local parish church, where everyone sat wearing their masks and/or visors. People greeted each other with waves and mimed hugs, and worship happened, but it did feel different and it took time before we could drag our thoughts from the strangeness to focus on the service.

But then, it must have felt really different for the disciples after the feeding of the 5,000. The amazing spiritual high was followed by a deep low as they found themselves struggling out on the lake, on their own, scared, all thoughts of what they had witnessed forgotten, when Jesus came, unlooked-for, saying "I am here, don't be afraid". It's a strange passage – Peter, the enthusiast, ready to leap out and do the impossible if his friend says the word, and then finding himself distracted by the high waves and sinking ... only to be told "you don't have much faith". Well, perhaps not ... but faith enough to get out of the boat ... faith as big as a mustard seed that would grow and develop and exceed all limitations.

Through it the disciples found a new experience of God in Jesus, who was with them (sometimes unlooked-for) in the peaks and troughs of existence, and found their faith deepened in a way that prepared them to cope with the challenges that lay ahead, not just the opposition they would meet but as the church community for the new age ahead. I pray that this may be our experience – that we may drag and our thoughts from the strangeness of what we will find in the days ahead, from the fears of possible "resurgence" and "second wave", from worries about the impact on those around us, to focus on Jesus, present with us, giving new hope, new insight, and new courage to walk with him into whatever lies before us in the days ahead.

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Reflection (Revd Susan Durber, "Still Praying", Granary 2011)

God of reason and wisdom, it seems obvious to us now, why Peter doubted. What is harder to understand is why he first believed.

We belong to a sceptical world where everything must be tested, validated, investigated and risk assessed. We would not walk on water without the necessary precautions or making preparations first. We find every reason to doubt and questions, and every move is carefully planned and checked.

But let us learn from spontaneous Peter the gift of taking risks and plunging in, of trusting beyond reason and hoping beyond expectation.

God of miracle and wonder, help us to find the world beyond the obvious, and the sacred that lies beyond the safe, so that we may step into the deep and find you there waiting for us gracing life with faith to make us truly brave. Amen.

Eyebrows (by Revd Mark Stobert, Lead Chaplain at Addenbrooke's Hospital – from BBC News website)

All this time eyebrows have been speaking to each other over the physical distance
a secret language taking place without the world knowing
what have they been saying?

All of a sudden eyebrows are leading the way of conversation and connection -
they beckon us into a conversation without words
narrowed down to

- a raise
- a furrow
- a flick
- a wave

I wonder what they have been saying,
without me being able to keep an eye on them (because I can't!)

All I can do is notice other people's eyebrows
and trust mine to respond and foster communion.