

Jesus walks on the water Matthew 14 v 22-33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

²⁸ 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

²⁹ 'Come,' he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Why does Peter sink?

When Peter steps out of the boat, initially all is good. As he moves toward Jesus, walking on the water with the waves and the wind all around him, all is fine. So, why does Peter sink? Or maybe I could ask: why, when we have been making it through the struggles of life, do we suddenly sink?

In America they have summer bible camps, and I remember hearing of an exercise called a "trust walk." As these campers moved toward the remote area of the "trust walk" just before midnight, their torches revealed a rope tied to a tree.

"This is the trust walk," the camp counsellor announced. "It is simple. All you have to do is grab onto the rope and walk forward into the darkness, blindfolded." Because, as with all eleven-year-olds, simply walking into the darkness of the deep woods was not enough...they needed to be blinded.

"Where does it go?" children asked nervously.

"You will find out. Just trust that it goes to the right spot," the counsellor assured.

And, so they did. They trusted as they fashioned the blindfolds around their eyes, and one by one took steps out into the darkness, following the rope with their hand.

All was well for the first hundred feet or so. You could still hear the giggling of the other campers waiting their turn, but soon, as they followed the rope, feeling themselves slip further and further into the deep woods, a familiar feeling starts to creep in.

It is the same feeling that creeps in when we have started a time sensitive task confidently, with our reputation on the line, but run into something worse than a simple snag.

It is the same feeling that creeps in when we stand up for what we believe, but others surround us with flaming torches and shouts of hatred.

As one of the campers followed the rope, about 200 feet in he started to scream. It was heard by one of the counsellors who bolted through the woods to come to their rescue. As they listened carefully, they were relieved to hear that all was fine; the camper had simply been overcome by fear.

But “Simply” is too gentle of a word when it comes to fear. Fear can completely derail us from whatever we are doing and derail us from the values that we hold, causing us to run away or ball up on the ground in self-protection.

Fear can often paralyse us.

It can take a confident Peter, who is amazingly walking across his turbulent waters just fine, and cause him to doubt and sink.

“Lord, save me!” Peter cried out.

Now, I fully understand, that fear can be a good thing. If a bear had crept upon one of the campers, fear for their life might have saved them. Fear allows us to retreat into safety. Fear can keep us alive. Those humans of the past who had no fear as the saber-toothed tiger approached them while they were weaponless never had the chance to have children. We are the children of all those who were easily motivated by fear who ran for their lives, fought back, or played dead.

But, here is the thing about fear. Fear of someone can easily turn into anger.

Nazis and bigots who fear that Jews and blacks are disrupting and endangering their own livelihoods have developed an anger toward those groups of people.

Jesus tells us outright not to harbour or continue in anger, because a well-tended anger can develop into a full-blown hatred. And, the destruction that hatred can cause has no bounds.

Hatred can lead us to think that it is right and even righteous to plow a car into a group of peaceful protesters.

Hatred can lead to the annihilation of a whole group of people for nothing more than the colour of their skin, the configuration of their genes, or the makeup of their culture.

Fear is inherently selfish. It thinks only of the self. It only seeks to protect the self. Fear disrupts the movements of love for other people in the kingdom of God.

So, how does Jesus respond when his people sink into fear?

“Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.”

Immediately, Jesus reached out to save Peter from the mess that his fear had caused. After all, the answer to fear is not more fear or the anger and hatred that can follow, rather the answer to fear is love. Jesus looks upon Peter with love and pulls him free so that he can once again be the disciple he was meant to be.

“Have no fear.” “Love your enemies.” “Pray for those who persecute you.” “Love your neighbour as yourself.” These are all invitations from Jesus to live out our lives in love rather than fear.

1 John 4:18 states: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

In Jesus there is no fear. In Jesus we find only love. In Jesus we see someone who went to the cross, not with a sense of fear, but with a sense of love. That love saved the whole world. When the world is sinking, Jesus responds with love. That is the way of the kingdom of God.

In these difficult times we are all living in at present, with trying to live in the “new normal,” with coming out of lock down, and the fear of a second peak of infections, it would be completely natural to be fearful. Fear is a natural emotion. It would be understandable for us to want to keep ourselves to ourselves. What we need to try and do is remember that Jesus is always holding out his hand to lift us up, and will always be walking by our side.

Stay safe – and stay reassured. GB Colin