

Dear Friends,

Matthew 14: 28-30

The friends of Jesus are in a boat struggling through a storm. Jesus has come to them walking on the water. The sight of him makes them feel afraid. Jesus calms them by saying "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid". In place of the earlier terror Peter suddenly finds a rather rash boldness. He says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water". In our service last Sunday, Roger Byard asked whether by saying this Peter was showing trust in Jesus or giving a test to Jesus. There is certainly something about it that leaves us feeling uneasy. When Jesus was baptised the voice of God spoke from heaven and said "This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased". These words of reassurance were quickly followed by the tests of the tempter who said "If you are the Son of God". Peter's "Lord, if it is you" is a little too close to the tempter's "If you are the Son of God" for comfort.

Maybe however they are words of trust. Peter knows that he needs to be completely open and responsive to Jesus. Everything needs to depend on the initiative of Jesus. He should not push ahead with spectacular ideas of his own unless Jesus gives the word. He knows that the right way is to wait patiently for the command of Jesus, to hear that word, accept it and live it.

Jesus gives his word. It is one single word and it is enough. Jesus says, "Come". Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. All goes well while his focus is on Jesus. But that doesn't last. He starts becoming aware of the wind and how strong it is and how easily it could knock him down and blow him away. His single-minded attention to Jesus is lost. He becomes frightened again and starts to sink down into the water. His life flashes before his eyes as his brain searches for experiences that will help him survive what will otherwise be inevitable death by drowning. He comes up with just one option. He cries out to Jesus. He says, "Lord, save me!"

One of the best insights into this story was given to me by a man who was serving a sentence in Brixton Prison where I used to do some visiting. This man's mind was fragile because of the substances he'd taken in a vain attempt to escape the pain he felt. One day he told me of a vision that he had received. He saw himself, dressed in long flowing clothes walking on water. This beautiful image however was destroyed when he saw hands come up from the waves, grab him by the ankles and pull him deep down into the sea.

God wants you to walk on water. That is, God wants you to know that you are God's loved child. God is in you. You are in God. God's love is in you. You dwell in God's love. God's desire is for you to be fully free, happy and alive. God's will is for you to share the good in you for the well-being of others. God wants you to walk on water. But there are so many winds and waves that distract you and pull your attention away from God. There are hands that reach up, grab hold and stop you from walking with God. You cry out with Peter saying "Lord, save me" and you wait hoping that God will be there and that God will act.

God bless you,

Tony