

## Reading - Matthew 14:22-33.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So 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, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

## Sermon

Storms come in all sorts of different ways striking individuals, families, churches, and nations. They take the forms of cancer, divorce, schism, famine, war – and I'm sure we can all tell stories about how life was blown off course or how we've been battered by the elements. And whenever those storms hit, so does the question of faith. Do we have faith? Do we have the right kind of faith? Do we have enough faith? And what happens when we begin to doubt?

The one thing this morning's Gospel story is not saying to us is if we have more faith, we'll get what we pray for. I can't emphasise that enough, because the number of times I've heard it said "if only you'd had more faith....."

If only you had more faith, you wouldn't suffer or struggle.

If only you had more faith the cancer will be healed.

If only you had more faith, things would be better... and so on.

That's not the kind of faith to which we are called. That is not what faith is about. That is more about magic than faith. It seeks proof or evidence in order to support belief. And it's the kind of faith that leaves us truly sunk when the storms of life strike. Let's face it, regardless of how much faith we have disease takes a toll on our body, accidents happen, loved ones die, relationships break up, we don't always get what we want. No matter how strong our faith the sea of life can be rough and stormy.

What this morning's Gospel reading reminds us, is that we have choices in our life of faith.

We can make the choice to do nothing: to stay in the boat and remain seated, ride out the storms.

Or we can make the choice to go in reverse: to backtrack and try to return to a time when life was easier before the storms hit. The good old days...

Or we can make the choice to move forward - to step out in faith and trust in Christ's presence.

I don't think staying in the boat is an option, no more than going backwards is an option. So the time has come to step out in faith.

To follow the example of Peter, one who understandably requires reassurance, he needs courage and determination.

Peter's needs **fortitude** because he's about to do something he has never done before.

He needs fortitude because he doesn't really know what the outcome will be. And he requires fortitude because he is stepping outside his comfort zone.

So there's our first question - Do we have that same fortitude?

When we met on Thursday evening with the members of the Transition Support Group, I'd met with them an hour earlier. "How many people do you think will turn up tonight", they asked.

"30 maybe 40" said I. There were 105. And that is hugely encouraging. People who have the determination, courage and resolve to see these churches move forward.

We need fortitude, that same determination and resolve to work through the aims and objective. No doubt we'll receive our aims and objectives from Thursday's meeting in the next day or so, and I suspect they'll include the following:

- . An aim to strengthen the union between Canonbie United and Liddesdale.
- . An aim get more elders on the Kirk Session in Liddesdale and strengthen the leadership.
- . To improve communication, so everyone knows what's happening.

- . To look at our mission to the wider community and be welcoming and open.
- . To be more active with bible study and prayer groups, but also social events.
- . To sing a new song unto the Lord! To look at our worship and ask how it can be made more meaningful and uplifting.
- . And if there are any “Elephants in the room” we’ll deal with them also..

Do you have the fortitude to step outside of your comfort zones and trust that whatever the future holds, whatever has to happen, we will not sink?

Secondly, Peter required **focus**.

Interim Ministry is very focused. Changes happen quickly, we move forward rapidly because there’s work to be done, and that requires a very clear focus.

But ultimately, our primary focus is on God. It’s very easy in the midst of meetings and aims and objectives, and activities and things going on, to look inwards – to look at ourselves and focus on what we are doing, what we’re achieving, and how we’re getting on. When really, we should be looking outwards, looking at God, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus in everything we do. And if we’re not focused on God above everything else, then we really are sunk. God’s will, God’s purpose, and God’s message to us today must be discernible in those aims and objectives we’re trying to achieve – and I believe they will be.

Moving forward also requires **failure**. You probably didn’t expect to hear that. Failure is a sign of weakness. Failure is something we don’t like to admit to. Failure is not what 121 George Street want to hear when I’m called in to partake in the Rich-tea Biscuit and the cup of tea! And yet, Peter had to fail. Failure is part of moving on.

Some of the greatest people in the Bible failed before they were able to move forward and achieve great things. Moses lacked faith

Noah got drunk

David had an affair

Elijah became exhausted

Jonah had a short temper

And Joshua was defeated and deceived – And yet, God used them and achieved great things.

Their failures kept them grounded and humble. Failures that brought them back to reality. Failures that taught them to trust in God.

If there are failures - when there are failures, we'll learn from them, we'll trust in God, and we'll move forward stronger and more faithful as a result.

And finally, overarching everything, Peter required **faith**.

Peter was to determine to get out of the boat and the outcome was in the hands of God. That's faith.

All sorts of things can happen which might cause us to doubt. We might have doubts about the future – will we ever find a minister? Doubts about whether there's enough key people to take responsibility for the life of the church – new elders. Some folk have raised doubts as to whether there will ever be peace and harmony in the church. But the thing is, these are all about faith in people.

On occasions I've gently reminded people that if being hurt by the church causes you to lose your faith in God, then your faith might have been in people rather than in God.

My faith in people has often been tested – but my faith in God is solid. Faith in his presence, his guidance, his forgiveness and his love.

Keep that faith - faith that we're going in the right direction and that God's Holy Spirit is at work

Strengthening our fortitude;

Clarifying our focus;

Nurturing us through our failures

and

Increase our faith.

Amen