

**ST ANDREWS GLENBROOK
UNITING CHURCH
9th August 2020**

The 10th Sunday
in the Season of Pentecost

GATHERING ACTIVITY

Grab a bowl of water.

Grab a sheet of paper.

Grab a pen.

There is a lot of vulnerability in our lives and our bible reading today.

And let's face it, no one likes to feel that way.

Our world has a way of high-lighting our weaknesses and fears.

Do you ever get that sinking feeling that you don't have enough faith?

Write down different words that you want to trust God with – family, faith, friendship, a particular situation, or anything you can think of.

Tear or cut each word out and place it in the bowl.

See how it floats?

Trust that God will grant you faith to place these things in God's hands.

SONG: 'O THE DEEP DEEP LOVE OF JESUS' (Tune: Morning has Broken)

Written by Samuel Trevor Francis, this version Audrey Assad

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me

Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of your love
Leading onward, leading homeward
To your glorious rest above

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus
'Tis heaven of heavens to me
And it lifts me up to glory
For it lifts me up to thee



Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus
 Spread his praise from shore to shore
 How he loves us, ever loves us,
 Changes never, nevermore

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

You come to us early in the morning;
 wind howling, waves crashing,
 the world unravelling around us.

You come to us walking on the water,
 proclaiming peace when
 we feel anything but peaceful.

Somewhere in our fear,
 we decided that we must be water-walkers
 to earn your love.

Forgive us when we step out of the boat
 to test ourselves,
 to test you,
 to shore up our faith,
 our egos, our fear.

You do not call us out to
 test our faith,
 you call us out in love,
 to be love
 and you are ever by our side.

Comfort us
 when the waves rock the boat.

Steady us
 when the wind is up,
 and our guard is down.

Challenge us to live our faith
 from grace's perspective
 knowing you match our steps,
 stride by stormy stride.
 Amen.

GROWING FAITH TOGETHER:

Have you ever played the game "What's the time Mister Wolf?"
 In the game, someone is chosen to be the wolf,
 and everyone else starts off in a straight line.
 Each person takes turns asking the wolf what



time it is, and if the wolf says it is two o'clock you take two steps closer to the wolf. The wolf waits till everyone gets closer and when he says its "dinner time" he will try and catch as many people as possible to eat for dinner (although not literally).

Have you heard the bible story where Peter asks Jesus if he can walk on water? It reminded me a little bit about the game "What's the time Mr Wolf" because Peter was always trying to get close to Jesus, but every time he did, he took a great risk.

In this story Peter nearly sank into the sea until Jesus grabbed him and hauled him into the boat and saved him.

One of the things that I love about this story is Peter asks Jesus if he should do something super brave and courageously crazy and Jesus simply says "Come". And so we discover that Jesus is with us when we are brave and taking a risk to be closer to him - and Jesus is with us when we fail and fall down, when we feel silly or embarrassed and you feel like giving up....

Jesus doesn't judge Peter for trying - Jesus says to Peter and to us:
Why did you doubt? Trust me - I am with you.

ALL-AGE PRAYER

Jesus Christ,
you know what it is to be afraid
and when you saw your friends soaked and scared,
you came to them.

While you were on your way,
you called to them
telling them it was okay to be afraid,
that you were with them on the water.

When Peter shouted out,
so excited and courageous,
you invited him to step out—
not to prove his faith
but to share your love.

And when the fear started
to beat harder in his heart
and his feet got wet with the waves,
you reached out your hand,
loved him,
and together you walked back to the boat.
Remind us that we are always safe with you.
Challenge us to make more safe places for each other
especially when we see other people scared.
Amen.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ²⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

SERMON: "Take heart, it is I do not be afraid" by Rev Christine Palmer

(South-West Sydney Community Minister)

When I was younger my family lived in Tasmania and our extended family lived on the mainland. Each year we would visit them. Because we couldn't afford to fly we would have to go across the sea on the ship. I have a fear of deep water where I can't see what's underneath. I always used to find getting on the ship terrifying as we would have to walk across a "bridge" from the pier to the ship over the deep water. I would have to focus straight ahead because if I looked down I would start to panic. I was always glad to have a parent with me to hang onto so that I was not crossing alone. In today's gospel story the disciples find themselves alone on the water terrified.

The disciples had been with Jesus all day. The day had started with Jesus trying to get away from the crowds and have some space to process the news of John the Baptist's death. But word was getting around about Jesus, he couldn't go anywhere without a crowd following him, people brought the sick to him for healing and were keen to listen to him speak about the Kingdom of God. As the day had gotten late the disciples were concerned that the crowds were hungry and there was nowhere close by for them to eat. They urged Jesus to send the crowds away but one look at the hungry crowd; hungry for teaching, hungry for healing, hungry for food, and Jesus had compassion, Jesus couldn't send them away.

Instead Jesus took what was offered, five loaves and two fish, broke bread and gave it to his disciples to feed the crowd, over 5000 people. Somehow everyone was fed. And there was food left over. Surely this was a day the disciples would never forget.

I wonder if you have ever experienced God in a way that you will never forget?

Immediately Jesus sends the disciples ahead of himself, in the boat to the other side while he dismisses the crowd and goes off up to the mountain to pray. The disciples, weary from a long day, follow Jesus instructions, and head off too.

As the disciples head out across the water the wind picks up. It is not too long before the disciples find themselves battling against the wind and the waves. Some of the disciples are fishermen. They are used to the rough conditions on the water. They've sailed many times across the sea of Galilee. They've sailed rough waters before, they know how to bail out the water, to row against the wind, they are experienced in such things.

I wonder if we find ourselves, like the disciples, battling against the wind, battered by the waves, of life. We've done this before we are experienced at trying to battle our way through difficult times, trusting in our ability and experience, head down working hard trying to ride out the chaos around us.

It interests me that up until this point fear is not mentioned. It is not till Jesus turns up that the disciples become terrified.

Jesus comes to the disciples, walking on the sea. It seems impossible, so impossible that the disciples don't even recognize that it is Jesus. Terrified they cry out thinking it is a ghost. It is Jesus presence and words that seem to terrify them more than the storm!

The disciples are about to be tested, not by the storm but by Jesus and his words.

Jesus speaks to the disciples "Take Heart, it is I; do not be afraid".

These words are familiar words deeply rooted in the Scriptures.¹

"Take heart" - have courage, these were the words of Moses to the Israelites on the edge of the Red Sea as they were fleeing the Egyptians.

"It is I" - these words remind us of "I am", God's words to Moses at the burning bush, and 'I am' littered throughout John's Gospel, I am the good shepherd, I am the bread of life I am.... I am ... I am... in these words we hear Jesus speak the power of God, as well as embodying that power. Jesus does what only God can - walk on water.

"Do not be afraid" - words said to Mary by the angel, words Jesus said to the the disciples not so long ago as he sent them off on their mission.

"Take Heart, it is I, do not be afraid"

These have been God's words to God's people through the ages in times of crisis in times where God's people are called and sent.

These were Jesus words to his disciples in a time of crisis.

Not recognizing Jesus or his voice in the midst of the storm was frightening and a threat to the disciples, but it is Jesus words that will really test them.²

Will they trust these words?

¹ Roger E. Van Harn, The lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Tests, THE Gospels. Ed. Roger E. Van Harn. p.88

² Roger E. Van Harn, p.88

I wonder if sometimes we fail to recognize Jesus presence in the midst of chaos and crisis and maybe it's more terrifying for us to trust God's words than it is to keep on battling on in our own strength.

At this point the story shifts to Peter. Having heard Jesus words, Peter tests them. Instead of allowing Jesus words to challenge him, in typical Peter style he challenges Jesus. "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water".

The story unfolds quickly from here. Peter steps out of the boat. And walks towards Jesus. Distracted by what's going on around him, the winds, the spray from the water, he begins to sink and cries out to Jesus to save him. Jesus doesn't leave him to sink. Instead he reaches out and catches Peter's hand and saves him, saying "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Once they are both in the boat the wind ceases. The disciples in the boat begin to worship Jesus, and confess "Truly you are the Son of God".

One of the earliest and most common art images of the church was a boat on the water.³ I wonder what this story might have to say to us as a church, as the people of God right now, what might it be saying to you?

Maybe we are like the disciples. We are seasoned fishermen/sailors. We've become used to the crashing waves, being battered by the storms, dealing with crises. We don't like it but we've become experienced in bailing out the water, trying to stay afloat, rowing against the wind; in fact some of us may even be quite proud of our capacity to weather the storm, thinking "we've got this, we know how to survive this," and we carry on as we've always done.

Perhaps what is more terrifying than the storm or crisis is not being able to recognize God in the midst of it, not being able to trust God's words...
"Take heart, it is I do not be afraid".

Are we able to trust God's presence and words in the midst of chaos? What words might it be that God is calling to us that may be even scarier than battling the crisis we are in the midst of?

Are we able to:

Take heart, to be courageous at this time when what we have known has changed so much, the freedoms we've enjoyed to gather, to worship have shifted. When our world's been turned upside down. What new thing might God be calling us to.

It is I. We worship the God who is able to walk on water, to make the wind and the waves cease, who is able to do the impossible.

Do not be afraid. God is with us.

³ Roger E. Van Harn, p.88

M. Eugene Boring states that:

“Faith is not being able to walk on the water – only God can do that – but daring to believe, in the face of all the evidence, that God is with us in the boat, made real in the community of faith as it makes its way through the storm, battered by the waves.”

And may this lead us to worship the Son of God.
Amen

SONG: ‘Oceans’ by Hillsong United.

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand
And I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now
So I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Saviour x 3

I will call upon Your name
Keep my eyes above the waves
My soul will rest in Your embrace
I am Yours and You are mine

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

Grab a bowl of water.

Grab a sheet of paper.

Grab a pen.

Write down the situations in our world or places and people who are on your heart on a piece of paper.

Spend some time in quiet prayer.

Tear or cut each word out and place it in the bowl.

And pray this prayer by Walter Brueggemann:



LIKE AN ENDLESS FALLING

Things fall apart,

the centre cannot hold"

We are no stranger to the falling part:

We perpetrate again the centre of our lives

and on some days it can feel

like an endless falling

like a deep threat,

like rising water,

like ruthless wind.

But you....you in the midst,

you back in play,

you rebuking and silencing and ordering,

you creating restfulness in the very eye of the storm.

You...be our centre:

cause us not to lie about danger,

cause us not to resist your good order,

Be our God. Be the God you promised,

and we will be among those surely peaceable in your order.

We pray in the name of the one through whom all things hold together.

Amen.

SONG: 'INTO THE DEEP' by Roxanne McLeod © 2019

From different streams of life, we come

Drawn to the Source of living hope

Ready to trust in the depths of God's love

Abandoning fear

God's calling us near

Chorus:

And so we will go into the deep

Where we will find our place with those who believe

The shallows behind together we'll be

Immersed in God's grace, carried by love

Into the deep

We will find peace in the mystery of faith
 Living our lives in joyful praise
 Ready to dive in the depths of God's grace
 Surrendering all
 We follow God's call

Chorus:

Here in the deep we are never alone
 As we declare one faith, one hope
 Learning from those who have gone here before
 Welcomed to be
 In God's family

Chorus:

And so we will go into the deep
 Where we will find our place with those who believe
 The shallows behind, together we'll be
 Immersed in God's grace, carried by love
 Into the deep

And so we will go into the deep
 Where we will find our place with those who believe
 The shallows behind, together we'll be
 Immersed in God's grace, carried by love
 Into the deep
 Immersed in God's grace
 Carried by love
 Into the deep

SENDING WORDS

Jesus, you are the Son of God.
 Even the wind and the waves, the stormy seas,
 are calmed by your Spirit.
 We might never walk on the surface of water,
 as if immune to life's troubles,
 yet, neither do we need to sink.

For you, Lord, are with us.
 Your hand is upon us.
 Your love is for us.
 Your commitment to us is endless.

Thanks be to God,
 and to the Son,
 and to the Holy Spirit,
 today and always. Amen.