

Matthew 14:22-33 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 toward 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 worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Peter goes for a walk

Imagine you go to a magic show, and you watch the magician find the chosen card in the pack, and make the coin disappear and reappear, and then saw a woman in half. And then you say: 'I saw what he did there, I'm ready to have a go myself!' No trouble could come of this, could it?

Imagine a different scenario — you pay for driving lessons and the instructor drives you to a quiet street, parks the car, and tells you to swap seats. But you say — 'No thank you, you're so much better than me, I couldn't possibly do what you do!'... so the instructor gets back in the driving seat, and drives around a bit, and charges you for a fairly useless tour of Ipswich...

One of these people you definitely shouldn't copy. One of them is there for you to copy. How do you know the difference? It's not that hard is it, really, as we know from the lack of accidental sawings-in-half.

In Matthew 14 we continue from where we were last week, where Jesus has just fed more than 5000 people because of his kindness — but also because this was a deep sign that he was the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven was coming. What we learn next is that the crowd understood the message... and tried to make him king by force! They were ready to commence an immediate coup, installing him as king in rebellion against Herod Antipas and Tiberius Caesar. Such a crowd would have understood everything about the titles that Jesus was due — Messiah, son of God and son of Man — but only understood this from a populist view, not what Jesus was really teaching.

What did Jesus do? He dismissed his disciples back into the boat (apparently anxious that they not be infected with this mistaken thinking about his role) and then dismissed the crowds and went off to be alone, to pray. You may remember that he had crossed Galilee in order to get some serious prayer time, and had still not had it. Jesus apparently prays most of the night before coming to catch up with the disciples. And so he goes for a walk, on the lake.

Matthew is quite clear that the boat is far from shore. He's not having us kid ourselves that Jesus was walking along the lakeside or in shallow water, and the disciples misunderstood! He also observes that the wind was high and the waves rough, a reminder about the calming the storm in Matthew 8, although the weather is crucial to this story, too.

Now, what time is it? Shortly before dawn, in the fourth watch of the night. Seeing Jesus in the dim pre-dawn light they must have been terrified! It wouldn't be much less alarming when he calls out: 'It's me, don't be scared!'

Now, remember my silly examples of magician and driving instructor? One of Peter's great strengths was his gung-ho faith. He knew that disciples were always supposed to become copies of the master, and here, tired as they were, in choppy water after little sleep, Peter is still Peter. 'If Jesus is doing this, it must be a lesson!' he seems to think, and immediately puts his hand up to have a go. And guess what — it works! We

always remember that Jesus walked on the water, but isn't it great that Peter walks on the water too? At Jesus's bidding; in his power, Peter too can defy physics and walk on the surface of the water. Peter is right! This was a driving instructor moment! Well done, Peter!

With his sight fixed on Jesus all goes well. But the water is choppy and Peter starts to worry, and starts to sink. But Jesus doesn't let him sink — he reaches out his hand, gently chiding 'you of little faith'. Peter had walked on the water with little faith, but he had seen what he *could* do, more than his limitations. He had taken Jesus's presence on the water as an invitation for him to go walking too.

There's a bit of a parable to this story. Our calm and logical church heads can look at the story and wonder why Peter was distracted by the wind. After all, he was walking on the water by Jesus's power, not because the water was calm! But it's different for us when the rubber meets the... well, water! Don't I know that I should trust God and put aside fear of failure? Does that stop me getting anxious? Nonetheless, the answer is not to focus on the risk. Rather, if I am walking by faith and doubts come, the answer is to put *more faith* in Jesus who enables me.

The second response is of course to remember that if Peter had never left the boat, he would never have walked on the water at all! Just as those crowds who came to hear Jesus teach would never had a miraculous meal if they hadn't left their homes.

And this gets us back to the repeated point that the kingdom of heaven comes both because Jesus inaugurates it, and because we choose to walk in the way of the kingdom, by faith. Jesus is the driving instructor, not the magician — he teaches so that we can do what he can do. Peter gets this and keeps having a go, working at the limits of his faith, and so growing his faith. But — is that what we are doing? Is our faith growing, too? Is it time for us to get out of the boat?

Amen. SDG.