

St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

Sunday 13th August, 2017

GOSPEL READING Matthew 14:22-33 *Jesus Walks on the Water*

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

“Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid!”

Amid the storm, Jesus comes to comfort, confront, and quell our anxieties. The people of Israel didn't quite love the sea the way we do. And even bronzed Australians know the power of the sea. Mick Fanning knows of lurking sea creatures – he has had more than his fair share of brushes with sharks. For Israel, the sea represents all that is dark, unknown and fearful. The ancients knew it as a thing that could swallow you, take your life.

And yet out there, lost to safety or hope, Jesus comes. “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid!”

It is a message that we need today. I want us to hear it with the kind of power that the disciple Peter does. Imagine – he invites himself out onto the water, directly confronting the powers of death – to come to Jesus.

This is a story about the authority of Jesus – over the sea, over fear, over all that threatens. So we wonder about what it is that causes us to fear - our inner demons, social powers, political powers...

This week there seems much to fear. Bully boy words in our news: ‘fire and fury’, ‘locked and loaded’. The wind howls and the waves threaten to swallow Guam, the Korean peninsula and who knows what else with nuclear strikes?

And we witness powers not taken because socially as a country we are divided. Plebiscite, postal ballot, political vote, no vote at all? As players of all persuasions jockey over the issue of same-sex marriage, it seems more and more that hatred and vilification will become the perfect storm

in our social landscape. I wonder what Jesus would seek to calm in that story this week?

The inner demons are perhaps those that impact us the most. Storms of our own making, storms based on who we are connected to. Storms of history, storms freshly brewing today. Most of these demons have a life and power of their own, and they threaten to swallow us. We all have them, and we all need the one who meets us in the storm to say, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid!"

Can we believe Jesus will do that? Can we believe he will meet us in the middle of what ails us? Dare we believe such love?

"Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid!"

It is an invitation to trust Jesus is who he claims to be. It is an invitation to trust he has authority over our storms. It is an invitation to step outside the sanctuary of the boat, and say that Jesus is Lord of our lives.

And that is a big leap of faith!

I think Peter is foolish, but I want to be like him. And I think that even though he doesn't fare well outside the boat, he will have learnt more than any who choose to stay put. For Peter has learned to trust in Jesus; and he has been confronted by the power of his fears; and he has learned that Jesus remains faithful and steadfast and holds out his hand in rescue. "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid!" Now that is power to calm the storms that push us around!

But how will we know if we stay cosy in the boat? How will we learn that Jesus truly has the authority of YHWH over the wind and the waves, if we dare not trust him over the edge?

I suspect it wasn't easy for Peter to climb out of the boat. But he didn't just want to *watch* what Jesus was doing, he wanted to be a *part* of it. And Jesus invites him, and Jesus invites you, and Jesus invites me. 'Come'.

"It is I, do not be afraid." "Come."

I love that Peter is outside the boat. I want to cheer him on, but I know that I am not meant to watch from a safe distance, I want to be closer to Jesus than that.

Even when Peter sinks, he is close enough for Jesus to reach out a saving hand. I want to be that close, even if it means confronting my fears and noticing the power of the wind and the waves. Isn't that what it is to walk on water?

It's interesting that Peter fears the wind. It is the very thing he cannot see. But maybe that is the same for us. We cannot see what will happen between North Korea and the USA. And yet many fear it. We cannot see what will happen around same-sex marriage. And yet many fear it. We cannot see the things that taunt the insides of our heads, and yet surely they hold power over us.

But we are not alone, as Peter is not alone. As the waters again threaten, Peter calls out to Jesus, his rock, his salvation. And with an extended hand, Jesus exerts himself over and above all that would swallow the faithful disciple.

And then together, they walk on the water back to the boat.

But why did you fear Peter? You know there is no need to fear. You know the key to being held and safe, no matter what happens to you.

Fears are powerful. They are pervasive. It is our lived experience – nuclear missiles, plebiscites and doubts in our head have real power over us. And Peter is like us all. No matter how amazing it may be to hold our own on the water, we are all subject to sinking. It is hard to keep focus. It is hard to remember that authority belongs to Jesus Christ.

We will fear again. And Peter will stumble again. This episode doesn't fix him for all time. And in this is good news. Peter will get in the way of Jesus, he will deny he even knew him. He is every one of us in that regard. But Peter also becomes the rock, in contrast to this story of sinking.

For to be a rock is to focus on the rock. Peter's failing in this story is a failure of focus, which is also a fail to trust. His strength is found in Jesus. He wants to be part of Jesus, and this is why he climbs out of the boat. But being with Jesus is just as challenging as it is comforting.

For stumbling and falling, sinking and doubting are all part of that journey of faith. They tell us that we do not have dominion; that we lack power; that our cleverness is not enough; that authority does not rest with us.

One of the greatest blessings in ministry is to discover that it is not up to me. It is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and the blowing of the wind (the Holy Spirit) that brings life, healing, salvation and has authority in this place.

And this is the right place to end such an incredible episode. Jesus and Peter are now in the safety of the boat with the others. And perhaps because Peter had courage to do what he did, but certainly because Jesus has shown his authority is of God, the disciples worship him.

"Truly you are the Son of God."