

SERMON

Matthew 14:22-33

Have Courage, have Faith

Nunawading and Waverley, 9-8-20

Dear friends in Christ,

I read about a car that went off the road with the driver and her child trapped inside. A woman stopped and helped. She noticed some smoke coming from the engine but still crawled in and freed the child. The driver was caught by her legs but with the assistance of another passer-by, she too was freed. Shortly after, the car was alight. Three other people stopped their cars but they stood their filming the scene on their mobile phones without offering assistance.

Could we be as brave as that woman and what would be our strength in a challenging situation? For us, it is not only responsibility or compassion or commitment to Christ but faith; faith in the presence of Christ. Let us use a more mundane example: would we invite someone to a Christianity explained course? To have courage we need to have trust in Christ and see him as our helper.

Jesus said to those in the boat, **take heart, have courage, it is I**. I think we can understand why the disciples were not just afraid but terrified. **They were screaming out of fear, "it is a ghost"**. It was dark, the men were exhausted and deprived of sleep and the wind had strained their nerves. Then, out of the darkness they saw a person approaching them. Their terror was understandable for in addition to the frightening appearance of a person, they saw that **he was walking on the surface of the lake!** This was no ordinary person.

Courage is required not only in threatening situations and emergencies but in other situations such as in giving generously to Asia Focus or to someone in need. A congregation deciding to step out of the boat and put on a street party for the neighbours requires courage. **To walk on water** seems frivolous and unnecessary. It is here in the Bible to inspire us to have courage when you feel like jelly, a courage that is built on a foundation of faith in Christ.

Courage and faith are needed when things seem hopeless. The boat had made progress; **it was many kilometres from shore** but a headwind sprung up, a fierce wind assaulting the boat, and the disciples were straining at the oars just to stay in one place. Congregations are like this; they suffer from weariness. The vision of the far shore disappears and they are reduced to just maintaining things, just surviving. Taking on mission and meeting a need in the neighbourhood requires courage and faith. Efforts are more like experiments, as the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us: **cast your bread on the waters**. Just see what comes of it. There will be failures, lack of commitment from members, resistance to change and headwinds but people, let's have courage and faith.

Why did Jesus terrify the poor disciples like that? It was much the same with the resurrection appearances. His ghostly appearance on top of the water was not like the transfiguration or changing water to wine. This display of sheer power is a little bewildering. However, that is the nature of God. He is not our play thing. He lets us stand teetering on the edge of a cliff then **throws out a hand to save us**. Jesus knew Peter would sink but he was there. I have seen Christians in shocking accidents but their experience of terror has been met by the hand of Jesus who pulled them out. In those times we say, "With Christ, I shall get through this."

Peter showed courage and faith. He did get out of the relative security of the boat. He did walk for a moment and even when his courage and faith left him, he called out, **Lord save me**. In a moment of extreme peril, Peter returned to what is essential: Christ the Redeemer who stands in the midst of death and saves us.

There will be many times when we are **people of little faith**, when fear overwhelms us and, like rabbits, we let ourselves be transfixed by the headlights of an oncoming car. Like Peter, we feel the ferocity of the wind rather than the fierceness of Christ's commitment to us. If we fall apart, isn't it great we fall towards the cross, towards our Saviour who is ready to catch us?

He will, then, restore us. Following the terror comes the moment of worship and restoration in the presence of Jesus, when we once again

confess who he really is, we are on our knees and say with the disciples in the boat, **truly you are the Son of God**. Then courage and faith will grow again. We are now ready to use that new courage and new faith that we have. Start again, I say, witness, reach out to straying family members. Let us give away our money where there is need, launch a new ministry or mission initiative, see a person in trouble and act, speak in front of a crowd, stand our ground against a bully, tell the truth when it is going to hurt, say sorry without excuses. Do the courageous things with faith in Christ.