**A Sermon on Matthew 14:22-33 for Sunday 9th August 2020 – Rev. Carol Harley**

**It’s not hard for us to have faith in the love and compassion of God when everything is going well in our lives. At this time of summer when the sun is shining, the birds are singing, children are laughing and growing up happy and well; when our relationships are calm; work is meaningful and politics are fair’ then we feel that God is there, watching over us in heaven, and that everything is alright with the world.**

**However, I think we have all discovered, it’s rarely the case that living in this world is so good, and even if it is for a short period, we start to worry that something is about to go wrong – because it generally does!! We are never free from storms – emotionally, socially, politically or literally. During this last year we have, as a world, seen some massive and devastating storms.**

**As I have read and thought about our Gospel reading for today from Saint Matthew - of Jesus walking on the water - or as my one Commentary refers to the story ‘Jesus, the Lord of the sea’, I’ve done so thinking also of the terrible destruction of life and property brought about by water or the lack of water.**

**The recent floods in Assam India and the devastating floods on 1st of January this year which destroyed Indonesia’s capital city of Jakarta together with forest fires in Uttarakhand, India and the Australian bushfire which started in December 2019 dominated the news. There would have been many people there who were praying for rescue, for relief and for safety. Some were saved, some were not. Locust swarms in East Africa and parts of India and Asia of biblical proportions reminded us that our feet on this earth stand on shaky ground. And the Asian cyclone ‘amphan’ in India and Bangladesh reinforced the instability of this earth.**

**At the moment we are still in the grip of the most deadly virus known to mankind, COVID-19, which has triggered a global pandemic and cost the lives of more than 500,000 people worldwide. What are we to make of our Gospel reading in the light of our present bombardment of disasters.**

**In last week’s Reading we heard that Jesus had tried to withdraw in a boat away from the crowds to find a place of solitude to pray. He wanted time alone to be with God but the crowds had followed him and, as always, he had compassion on them and fed them. Now, in this morning’s reading from Matthew – after Jesus had fed the crowds he made his Disciples get into a boat to cross to the other side of the lake while he dismisses the crowds and makes space to be alone to pray. Times of solitude and praying to God were of the utmost importance to Jesus to enable him to fulfil his life and ministry.**

**Even though Jesus would eventually go to the Cross and die, he always held onto his close relationship of prayer with God, his Father.**

**As our Gospel story continues the Disciples were being tossed around by the waves and they were afraid. Early in the morning – so the Bible tells us - between 3 and 6 o’clock Jesus, after praying all night, came to the Disciples walking on the water. First they thought he was a ghost – but he says to them ‘COURAGE, IT IS I, HAVE NO FEAR’. Then Peter, always the impetuous one of the Disciples, says: *‘Lord, if it’s really you, order me to come out on the water to you’.***

**Peter desperately wants to be like Jesus. He doesn’t want power, any more than Jesus did, but he wants to be a calm in the storm. And Jesus grants him his request and Peter starts to walk towards Jesus. But he saw the choppy waves and felt the wind and was afraid and began to sink, calling out*, LORD, SAVE ME’*! Jesus’ response was to reach out his hand and catch Peter and then Jesus rebukes him: FIRST for having little faith and THEN for doubting Him, saying*:* ‘How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?’ With this story, we have to remember that Peter did have enough faith to step out into the storm and begin to trust Jesus, but that trust was threatened by the wind and waves.**

**So within the storm - WHERE DO WE place our trust? Jesus calls us to trust in Him – and through him - to God. This is asked of us even when the storm we are in may seem dangerous and life-threatening. The one, and only one, relationship that’s worth trusting and clinging onto is with God,**

**even if we are in danger, even if we die as, of course, Jesus and Peter did.**

**Being ‘SAVED’ doesn’t mean that our life will always be saved but it means being in relationship with God no matter what happens in our life. It means being ‘HEALED’AND that means that we, each of us, build our life in and around our relationship with God and that we allow everything else to fall into place around that. It means spending time alone with God for prayer, contemplation, for silence, to allow God to be truly present to us, even in a storm, even if that storm is a storm of doubt.**

**And so, as our Gospel account continues Jesus and Peter return to the boat. The storm calms and the disciples and Jesus travel together to land. In this story of Jesus, Matthew is offering us, THE CHURCH, hope and comfort during troubled times. The community of faith can trust in the presence of Jesus with them, even though later on he dies, because of his resurrection he is present to the church forever.**

**Matthew’s Gospel ends with Jesus saying, *‘Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age*.’ Through Matthew relating this story, we find ourselves called to be like Jesus, to spend time in our lives for prayer. We’re called to trust in the God that Jesus revealed, even among the storms we may go through, and Jesus’ words of comfort remain with us always as he stretches out his hand,: *‘Come’, he says ‘it is I. Do not be afraid’.***

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**