

Homily for the 9th Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 14 22 to 33

"Early in the morning Jesus came walking towards them on the lake."

A story for you:-

A new Catholic Priest came to town.

His colleagues, the local vicar and minister, thought they would welcome him into the town so they took him on a fishing trip.

They got into a boat and rowed out to the middle of the lake. After a while the vicar said "I'm cold I'll just go back and get my sweater." So he climbed out of the boat and walked across the water to the bank and returned with his sweater.

Then the Methodist Minister wasn't having any success so he said "This baits no good. I'll go and get some more. He too climbed out and walked to the bank and returned with some more bait.

The new Priest wasn't going to let the others think they had more faith than him so he said "I'm hungry so I'm just going to get my sandwiches." As soon as he climbed out of the boat he sank!

As they pulled him out of the water the minister said to the vicar "Do you think we should tell him about the stepping stones?"

Personally I think Jesus walking on the water is more difficult to come to terms with than the miracles that tell us how Jesus healed people. Nature miracles, as they are called, seem to go against all the laws of science and the world that God created seems to be turned upside down.

Sadly these nature miracles seem to give people who have no faith an opportunity to mock what we believe. They can understand that people do get better but nature never changes.

Do you know the musical Jesus Christ Super Star!

Herod taunts Jesus singing:-

"Prove to me that you're no fool. Walk across my swimming pool."

So how do we answer the critics?

What do we say to those who mock our faith?

Let's look at some possibilities:-

1 First we could say we don't understand how Jesus could have walked on water, but it's there in the Bible, so we believe it.

2 Or we could say that God made the laws of science, so he can break them whenever he wants. In other words all things are possible for God.

3 Or you could suggest that perhaps Jesus made the disciples see a vision.

4 Or you could agree that the disciples could have made up the story to prove a point. Because that is the way the people expected the Son of God would do things. In other words give the people what they wanted! But perhaps it doesn't really matter what we say. If you concentrate on what happened and don't ask the question what did it mean I think you miss the point!

Jesus had just fed a large crowd with bread in the wilderness - this would remind them of Moses who fed the people with manna from God.

Remember how the Jews dreamt of a Messiah who would be a bit like Moses - but even better! They wanted someone who would release them from the Romans.

Just as Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt they were looking for a leader who would rid them of the Romans. (Give the people what they want!)

The story tells us how after feeding all the people Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray, while the disciples went out in the boat to fish. All night the disciples boat had been battered by a storm, but early in the morning Jesus came walking across the water to them.

The disciples had had a tough night in the storm so it's likely they would be frightened. Perhaps it seemed as if

a ghost was walking towards them but Jesus calls out to them:-

"Don't be afraid, it's me."

When Peter realises who it is he thinks he would like to have a go at this walking on water thing!

So he steps out of the boat and for a moment all seems well. Then perhaps he realises what he is doing, he becomes frightened and he starts to sink. Jesus holds out his hand to him and saves him. When they get back into the boat the wind dies down. Maybe the important thing is the disciples recognize Jesus as the "The Son of God."

Back in the Old Testament Moses had died before the journey was complete and it was left to Joshua to complete the journey. It was Joshua who parted the waters of the river Jordan so that the Israelites could walk across to claim Canaan for God's Kingdom.

Perhaps Jesus reminded them of Joshua. They hoped that he'd reclaim Judea and Galilee for them. However, we know that that never happened and by the time the Gospels were written, Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans and the Jews had been driven out.

The church was being persecuted by their neighbours
and by the Romans.

Perhaps the Church felt a bit like that little fishing
boat, out on a stormy lake.

Being buffeted by the winds and sea.

Perhaps Jesus seemed a long way away.

Perhaps the words of Jesus reassured those terrified
early Christians.

"Don't be alarmed, it's me!

Don't be afraid!"

That same message is there for us today.

When we face what seem to us to be overwhelming
problems.

Jesus says:-

"Don't be alarmed, it's me!

Don't be afraid!"

As Christians we know that Jesus is alive.

That he is never far away from us.

Even when things seem so dark he will come to us
through the storm and walk with us.

You don't need to understand how a man could walk on
water to believe that.

God bless you all.

Revd Stephen