

**Matthew 14:22-33**

**WALKING THE WAVES**

How are you going at the moment? Going strong, feeling like you are walking on water? Or struggling a bit with something either in your life or around you, so that you feel like you are sinking? It's a question we get asked a bit nowadays, isn't it, and it is good that we are focusing on our mental health and well-being a bit more than we have in the past. And there are different ways we can respond to those questions, and different ways we can measure our answers. I want to introduce to you today the 'Wave Test' (I don't think this has been done before). When it comes to reflecting on yourself and how you are going, do you feel like you are coming up against powerful and crashing waves, being faced with or going through things which are tossing you around and you can't get away from or overcome them? Do you feel like the waves in your life are smaller, and you are still staying afloat, but you are bobbing around on them, perhaps being pushed in directions you don't really want to go, and finding it hard to move forward? Or is your feeling right now one of being on a sea of ripples, gently being rocked by how you are feeling and what is happening, so that it's not a feeling of complete calm and rest, but it's ok; it might take a bit longer but you'll still get there? Or are you experiencing that beautiful thing of calm, flat, waters, moving around when and as you want, and just being able to relax and soak up all life is giving you right now? I wonder if you can relate to one, or more, and quite possibly all, of these wave images for how you are feeling in your life at different times. (My little disclaimer: this 'Wave Scale' is for the purpose of this illustration only, and should not take the place of properly produced mental health checks)

I've heard people sometimes refer to accounts like the one we have here of Jesus and Peter walking on water as a 'Parable'. We know that's not an accurate description, as a parable is a story Jesus made up to teach something, but this story actually happened; we might call it a 'miracle account'. But still, like a parable, there are many different things to take from it, many different views to see it from, many different things we learn about God and His relationship with us. It is an account we can come back to again and again, to be

comforted and strengthened by what we have learnt before, but also be surprised by the new insights which come to us.

When you read or think about this account, what do you see, what comes to mind for you? Is it Jesus, tired from feeding around 15,000 people and still grieving the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, showing us the importance of prayer by leaving the disciples and going away to pray? Is it the disciples in their boat crossing Lake Galilee where storms could quickly whip up, scared and frightened in the middle of the night as their boat was threatened to be swamped, and then seeing a strange apparition walking towards them? Is it Peter, firstly confessing His faith by asking Jesus to call him out of the boat, but then having that faith leave him when he realised what he was doing, so that he began sinking? Is it Jesus, in response to Peter's struggle and cry for help, Himself going over and reaching down to pick Peter up; such a great illustration of God's grace towards us? Is there one of these aspects, or another, of this story which stand out for you, or do they all speak to you at different times?

This is one of those stories, like many in the Bible, which is so well-known and loved that we can easily think we have seen and know everything which is here. But God's Word, being the living and active thing it is, keeps on throwing new teachings and understandings up at us – it is a book like no other. Something I read or thought this week as I was studying this account made me look at another teaching which is here. If we have a look at the middle of this reading, verse 28-29, what happens here? Peter asks Jesus to call Him out onto the water, Jesus does call Peter out, and in faith He steps out. He steps out with the call and confidence of Jesus' call. But something I had never really focused on before; what doesn't Jesus do here? He doesn't take away the waves. The storm is still there. Peter is not walking towards Jesus under a beautiful clear sky and on water which is like glass. The wind and the rain are still blowing in Peter's face, the waves are still crashing against his legs. Jesus' response to Peter's call isn't to take away the waves, but to give Peter the faith, the hope, the strength, to walk both on and through them.

Sometimes, in answer to our prayers, God does take away the waves. At other times He gives us the faith, the hope, the strength which we need to walk through them. Let's go back to the Wave Scale we looked at earlier. I'm pretty sure that we can all relate to these four sizes of waves, and every level in between, at different stages, days, and even times of our lives. On a world scale, what are the big waves which try to crush

you? Fears about the future of the planet, wars and threats of wars, natural disasters of a scale that we wonder how the human suffering can be helped, the state and future of the world. What are the mid-sized waves? International politics and economic situations which affect our own lives and economy and what we can and can't do, pandemics and how they are dealt with, social justice and oppression. What are the ripples? Perhaps the value of the dollar and how that affects the price of fuel and things we want to buy. And what is happening the world, the care and compassion which is being shown, which give you that image of a smooth, calm sea?

How about on a national or societal level? What are the big waves? The cost of living which leads to increased numbers of homeless people, businesses closing, unemployment rising. The rate of domestic violence, in which this week like so many weeks we have seen multiple cases of people losing their lives in these situations. What are the smaller waves? Maybe the dissatisfaction with our leaders and some decisions they are making. How we feel about the state of the economy, where things are headed, even values which we find it hard to accept and even to see being practiced. What are the ripples? 'Why don't they just listen and do everything my way?' 'Things used to be better back when ...'. And what are the things happening on that wider level which make us feel like we are on the flat, calm water? That we live in a country in which our health, education, welfare, police and security, and government systems mean that we very very blessed, even though we don't always recognise that.

And personally, right now in your life. What are the storms, the big waves, you are facing, feeling like you are crushed by, that you are struggling to move through? It might be sickness or hardship for yourself or someone close to you. A close relationship which has either completely ended or has no apparent hope of being restored. A bad situation someone close to you is in. Abuse or hurt you have suffered in the past or are still going through. Grief at the loss of a loved one, no matter how long ago. What are the smaller, but still disruptive waves? Financial pressures. Relationships which aren't what you want them to be. Conflict with a friend, neighbour, or colleague. Uncertainty about where you want to go in life, or about how to get where you do want to go. Death of a friend. The ripples, what are they for you? As you get older you can't do what you used to do. Missing those who no longer live nearby. Having to plan or readjust plans you had made previously. And the flat calm waters, when do you feel you are floating nicely on them? Maybe when you are able to think about God's love for you and the blessings He gives you in your life.

When Peter was overwhelmed by the waves, his faith wavered, and he began to sink. Sound familiar? He went from focusing on and trusting Jesus and His call, so that he was overwhelmed and distracted by what was around him and he started to sink. That's a really good illustration of what happens to us, isn't it, when we are faced with the waves, of whatever size? But what does Jesus do? He walks over to Peter, reaches out, and lifts him up. Think about the words which are used here; who is the one who is actively working? Jesus. 'Jesus reached out', 'He helped Peter up'. There is God's love and grace, which we also experience in our lives, shown so perfectly. Through Jesus and His love for us, God both helps us to walk the waves, and reaches down to pick us up when we are struggling to get through them.

A quote I read this week says, 'The presence of Jesus is often most visible and welcome when we are caught in a storm and rowing against the wind'. God, and His love for us in Jesus, are always there with us, but we don't tend to notice and see them so much when the water is smooth and calm. Thank God He is also there with His strength, love, forgiveness, hope, and peace when do face either the small ripples or the large waves which come before us in our life. We know we can pray to God, we can look to Him, knowing that sometimes He will calm the storms of our lives, but at other times He will be with us in walking the waves, so that as hard as it might be we even get through things we didn't know we would get through. In the midst of our storms, in our waves, the words Jesus spoke to the disciples in the boat are the words that in faith we hear also; 'Don't worry! I am Jesus. Don't be afraid'. (v. 27b). Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- What are the 'waves' you are facing and going through in your life? The big and crushing waves which overcome you? The smaller waves which still toss you around and prevent you from doing and feeling what you want to? The ripples which slow you down a bit and let you know all is not as it could be?
- When do you feel that you are on the calm, smooth water? Are there people who help you feel like that? Is there something you do which brings you to that 'place'?
- Are there particular events/feelings/people which, like Peter, cause you to take your eyes off Jesus and stop trusting Him, so that you begin 'sinking'?
- Have you had situations you have been through, waves you have faced but you don't know how, and you can only put it down to God's guidance and strength in getting you through?

Pray: Thank God for being with us in both the calm seas and the rough storms of our lives. Ask Him to help us to always look to Him and to remember He is helping us to Walk the Waves even when things get tough for us.

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