

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

9th August 2020 – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

MATTHEW 14:22-33

KEEP LOOKING UP

Do you ever have those times when you feel you can walk on water? Times when you feel invincible, like you can take on anything that comes before you or into your life. You might feel like you have a strong shield like Thor that can deflect anything that threatens this feeling of strength and security. Any criticism that people throw your way is just water off a duck's back. You feel confident, secure in who you are, and while challenging things happen both to you and to those around you, they are nothing you can't get through. Do you ever feel like that?

Do you ever feel like you are sinking? The wind and the waves that are a part of all of our lives just seem to overwhelm you. Something which happens, or a comment which is made, that might normally not affect you at this time brings you down. Like Peter, as you step out of the boat all you feel is the wind, all you see are the waves. You feel like you are just barely keeping above the water. You feel vulnerable, deflated, and you wonder how you are going to face the things you need to do. Do you ever feel like that?

For a lot of us we can experience either of these feelings at different times, and it can make you wonder; what causes the difference? One day or one minute you can take on the world, the next you feel like the slightest gust will blow you over. Why is that? Sometimes there is a very logical reason for it; a tragedy may have happened in your life, you may have had a fight with someone, you may be disappointed about something which has or hasn't happened, you may have copped criticism about something. But, I don't know about you, for me sometimes I can go from the 'taking on the world', to the 'sinking under everything' feeling, very quickly and without even really knowing why.

Right at this time we are in now, from what I have experienced, seen and heard from others, this constant change between feeling we are floating and sinking isn't uncommon. With so much uncertainty, constant change, threats and adjustments around us, we can easily go from walking on top of the water to sinking underneath very quickly. A number of music artists have recently released albums they have written and recorded during the lockdown times (what else are they going to do?), and one of my favourite artists, a guy called Passenger, has a new song with the line in its chorus, 'I'm feeling fine, and I'm not'. It's a line that has been going through my head a lot these last couple of months.

Sometimes we don't see who is there to help us in the storms, until we are in the storm.

This great story we have in today's Gospel reading, of Jesus and Peter in the storm on Lake Galilee, is such a powerful reminder to us that God is always with us in the storms we go through. There's actually two parts to what we learn here. The first is that God calls us to step out and follow Him in faith. When Peter and the others discovered that it was Jesus who was coming to them when they were in the storm, at Jesus' invitation Peter stepped out of the relative safety of the boat and started walking towards Jesus. Initially, as long as he kept looking up, kept looking at Jesus, Peter did ok.

Having faith, and stepping out in faith, means that we will also be called to 'step out' sometimes from what makes us feel safe and secure. Stepping out might for us be putting aside our preferences for how things should be done, or what we like, for the sake of sharing the Gospel and strengthening others. Stepping out might mean putting aside things we want to hold on to; past hurts, resentment, our pride, our selfishness. Stepping out might mean putting ourselves out so that we can serve others more effectively in the way that God calls us to do.

And then, the second strong lesson here, is that God comes to help us and lift us up in the storms we face. After Peter took that initial step of stepping out in faith, he started to become afraid. Perhaps he had a wave come up and slap him hard on the leg. Perhaps he felt the sting of the wind blowing the rain into his face. And these things may have caused Peter to

look down. He was walking on water! Matthew writes it here very plainly; ‘when Peter saw how strong the wind was, he was afraid and started sinking’ (v. 30). Peter stopped looking up at Jesus and instead was distracted and afraid of the wind and the waves around him. With his eyes no longer on Jesus, he went from being invincible and being able to take on the world, to sinking when he realised he couldn’t cope with what he was doing.

But then, what happened. Despite his doubts, and his fears, and his lack of trust, Peter still had enough faith there to make that simple call to Jesus, “Save me, Lord!” And here is the great part of this story: in response to a simple cry from someone who is struggling with their faith, Jesus walks over, reaches down, and lifts Peter up. It is Jesus who lifts Peter up, Peter doesn’t do anything here after He has called out. And then Jesus takes Peter back to the safety of the boat, and the wind and the waves die down. When Peter’s view is changed to looking to Jesus for help once again, he gets the help he needs to get through the storm.

What’s the key again? Keep looking up. Keep our eyes on Jesus as we go through the storms. In our worship service this morning we had a great reminder of this as we witnessed a baptism. In baptism we have a guarantee that when we are brought into God’s family, He makes us a promise that we don’t sink, we walk with Him, and He will never leave us. It’s something we can hold on to and rely on because it fully relies on Him, not on us. Remembering that we are a part of God’s family in baptism, no matter how long ago it was, is a part of looking up.

Whenever we come together to celebrate Holy Communion, as we do regularly in our worship services, we receive the body and blood of Jesus with the bread and wine. In doing so we receive the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, and food for our faith to grow and keep us strong in all we go through. We are reminded in such a strong, physical way in this meal; Jesus died for me. My sins are forgiven. Jesus now helps me through any storms I face.

And then, God’s Word. Through God’s Word as we read it, as we hear it, as we contemplate it, as we experience it through being encouraged and supported by our fellow

Christians, exposing ourselves to God's Word in any of these ways means we are looking up; keeping our eyes on Jesus. It means we are hearing the words of God's love, being reminded of God's forgiveness, being reminded, through accounts like this one, that God is with us always. Through our baptism, through Holy Communion, through God's Word, the Holy Spirit comes to us to help us to keep our eyes on Jesus, and so to help us to get through the storms.

We face storms. We feel the wind. We see the waves. These things are a part of our lives. Sometimes we feel that we can walk through them strongly and confidently, at others we feel like we are sinking. This beautiful Gospel account reminds us that God is always there with us to help us in the storms, that when we call out with even the smallest amount of faith He helps us to have the strength through His promises and His presence to get through them. Look up at all times. But remember to look up when you need strength. To look up when you need help. To look up knowing that God is always there with and for us. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/REFLECTION

Getting Through Our Storms

Facing storms, wind, and waves, is a part of the life we live in each day. Even when we have faith in God we don't avoid them, it's just that with God's help we get through them.

- What are some of the storms you face in your life? Do they normally relate to things which are happening to you, or to others, or both?
- Do you always feel that God is with you at these times? If not, what are some ways that you can keep 'looking up' so you can see Him?

Keeping Our Eyes on Jesus

In this Gospel account, Peter in a very real and physical way took his eyes off Jesus and then started sinking. When he then physically cried out to Jesus for help, he was lifted up and helped back into the boat.

- What can cause you to take your eyes off Jesus; to begin looking down instead of looking up?
- When you do this, in what ways can you begin looking up again?
- What does it mean to you that with even the smallest amount of faith, when we call out to Jesus, He comes to lift us up and help us through whatever we face?

Stepping Out in Faith

This Gospel account is also a call to step out in faith; to leave the safety of the 'boat' and follow Jesus' call.

- In what ways do you hear Jesus calling you to follow Him?
- What is He asking you to leave behind/let go of as you do this?
- Pray for God's strength to both hear this call, and for the strength and obedience to follow it.