

Pentecost 9 Dealing with Fear. Matthew 14: 22-33

Jesus went up the mountain to pray alone. Perhaps he was tired after feeding the 5000 and ministering to their needs. Or he was making a nifty escape from those that wanted to force him to be their king, people who were tied to their own view of what a saviour would be like. Instead, he was going to be alone with his Father and the Holy Spirit, to talk and listen to them.

He'd sent the disciples ahead in the boat. When they were distant from the land, the boat was buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. (I've always had healthy respect for being in a boat. For me a cruise round the Mediterranean would be scary!) The disciples were getting frightened by now, and then they thought they saw an apparition.

Now Jesus was coming to meet them. I suppose there was no other boat, so he decided - still in communion with the Father, to walk to them on the lake.

The disciples were terrified, shouting, "It's a ghost!" Immediately, Jesus called out, "It's me! Take courage, don't be afraid."

It's natural to be afraid. What causes most fear at the moment? Covid? Loneliness? Fear of old age? Fear of illness? These are common to most of us.

We have become a very individualist society, each one for themselves, deciding for themselves, each one 'knowing what's best'. Why not see Jesus in the situation? He's not far away, but close by, stretching out his hand, keeping us company; and guiding us through fear to trusting and giving thanks.

And he was close by for the disciples in their fear. "Don't be afraid." Peter was filled with bravado, and called out, "If it's you, tell me to come to you over the water!"

Jesus said, "Come!"

Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water, coming towards Jesus. He surged forward, but was suddenly overwhelmed with fear of the wind, with the result that he started to sink. "Lord, save me", he cried.

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith, who did you doubt?"

Jesus was not criticising Peter, nor condemning or complaining. In his love for Peter he was calling him to turn away from fear and to come towards Jesus in his whole way of life. Repentance means to turn round in one's attitudes not just in the moment of need, but in the whole of life.

When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

Giving thanks, when attacked by fear, increases trusting in Christ, for it hands over the problem to him, and grows faith as we see the results.

How the angels rejoice when each person gives thanks in difficult situations; it's a sign to them of growing confidence in Christ Jesus, in his love and care for each person.

Much more fun than grumbling and complaining!
Amen

Jack Pechey has just been knighted at the age of 95. He grew up in London in a tiny flat with his mother. He went out to earn money for rent and food. In WW2 he served in the navy, then as an aircraft engineer. On being demobbed he joined a firm and hoped for promotion, but was told he didn't have 'managerial qualities'; so he left, bought a car and started a taxi business, gradually building up the business, then buying and selling cars, and then buying and selling property. He had such a positive outlook and seemed to succeed in all he did!

He felt for young people who had no confidence in life, so he started a foundation to help them grow in confidence, perseverance and ability. And he was knighted for it.

He always carried a card in his pocket. On one side it said:

THINK SMILE!
and on the other it said,
DON'T 3CS (criticise, condemn,
or complain)

Notices.

Songs of Praise is on BBC One at 1.15 pm on Sunday, and then is available on BBC iPlayer at 1.55 pm.

BBC Radio 4 is broadcasting Sunday Worship at 8.10 am.

Coventry Diocese are producing streamed services from 10am on their FaceBook page and YouTube channel.

On August 2nd the theme is 'Sabbath Rest' It is not a communion service. Try these links:

<https://www.facebook.com/DioceseofCoventry/>

and

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuWeQd6g5n-J1FUSQQZ_XJQ

Prayers:

Lord God, be with our nation as we try to cope with the continued problems caused by coronavirus.

Encourage those whose businesses are failing, those who have lost work, and those struggling to receive benefits.

We pray for a fair and just society, that does not judge, but acts with love and compassion towards all people.

Grant that in these changing times,
we also may change;
that love and peace may flourish,
that we may grow in love and trust towards our Saviour,

overcoming our fear, and giving thanks in all circumstances. Amen