

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 13th August 2023**

Prepared by Revd Tim Searle

Preparation

As we prepare to worship let us keep silence for a moment as we calm our minds and focus on God's unfailing presence with us all.

Pause

Call to Worship

God, lover of the lost and healer of the broken, you reconcile those divided by sin and you call the outcast to be a guest at your table.

Be with us here in this place today,
teaching us mercy and love.
Help us to praise, love and serve you,
in our worship and in our lives.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Be thou my vision (StF 545, vs. 1, 2, 4 & 5)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiukM6WHQEQ>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of Heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joy after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Eternal God, creator of all, giver of life,
we praise and worship you.

We thank you that you have
always loved the world you have made;
and that, however far we stray from you,
your love is always there to welcome us home.

We do not deserve your love,
but we dare to believe the good news of your
mercy declared by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Be present with us this day
as with penitent and forgiving hearts
we celebrate your sacrifice of love.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
that our worship may truly express our love
for you and for one another.
Make us glad and give us joy and peace.

Silence

God of justice and mercy,
we come before you
knowing that we are all in need of forgiveness.

We have sinned against you
in our speaking and in our silence;
in our thinking and in our thoughtlessness;
in our actions and in our inaction.

We have sinned against you,
in not loving you with our whole heart
and soul and strength;
in not loving our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Grant us, O Lord, your forgiveness,
restore us in the image of your Son,
and lead us along the way to your kingdom,
to the glory of your name.

Silence

Lord Jesus,
We recognise that you have given each one of us
a part to play in your body.
We thank you that you believe in us
and have a vision for your church.
Strengthen us where we are weak,
guard us where we are strong,
give us humility where we are proud,
and in your patient love
continue to call us to serve you
wherever and whenever needed. Amen

Read [Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b](#)

Read [Matthew 14: 22-33](#)

Reflection

I have a confession to make. I really struggle with 'miracles', at least in the supernatural sense of the word. Yes, I accept that there are lots of little miracles that happen every day; the birth of a child, the overcoming of adversity, the skill of a surgeon or the craft of a concert pianist, to name but a few. But when it comes to those supernatural acts of power, the signs and wonders that the Bible is filled with, I confess to a certain amount of scepticism when I read them. Perhaps there's too much of the scientist or engineer in me! There must be a rational explanation, I think. Like the smoke and mirrors of a good magician who's perfected the art of getting the audience to look the other way whilst turning logic into magic with imperceptible sleight of hand. So, when we get episodes like this week's lesson from Matthew where Jesus 'walks on water', I'm immediately hooked into thinking how this effect was created. Did the disciples see what they wanted to see in their fear-filled state? Was Jesus walking on a mud flat or in shallow water that gave the impression he was defying gravity? Or was it truly a bona fide miracle, where faith broke the laws of physics and where any one of us, should we be so faithful, can have access to these powers?

The problem with water-walking, as my introduction reveals, is that it can easily side-track us from what the reading is really all about. The heart of the story is about our fear, and the release we can have from it when we place our trust in Christ.

The context of our reading is that Jesus had been trying to get away from the crowds (and possibly the disciples too!) for some time after a gruelling part of his ministry. Immediately before this week's section of Matthew 14 is the feeding of the five thousand which starts with Jesus trying to find space once again, only to be pursued by a multitude intent on hearing his teachings. Exhausted though he was he had compassion on them healing the sick and preaching the good news. Even when the hour was late and the

disciples were ready to send them away, Jesus is the one who effectively says, 'no, these people are hungry, we need to feed them.' After the miracle, Jesus made the disciples go off in their boat whilst he dismissed the crowds before heading up the mountain alone to pray. All is well, or so we think.

Meanwhile, the disciples, some of whom were experienced fishermen well used to the ebb and flow of Lake Galilee have been caught in a storm. Their calm is disturbed as the boat is battered and the wind pushes them further out to sea. These seasoned fisher-folk, it seems, become unstuck, not necessarily because of the storm itself, but from the fear, confusion, and panic that it induces in them. Yet again, Jesus responds, Jesus has compassion. He doesn't push their fears to one side, just like he didn't push the needs of the multitude to one side. Though we might feel that Jesus was due a well-earned break, Matthew's retelling here is emblematic of a God who never rests, who never tires of reaching out to save us. Whenever a voice cries out in the storms of life, God in Christ through the mystery of the Spirit brings peace, even to places where it seems peace has no earthly place in being there.

So, if the faithfulness of God's response to our need is the first mega theme we can attribute to this reading, then the second has to be about our response, in turn, to God. It's no wonder that, with their nerves shot from a night battling the waves that their initial reaction to Jesus' walking on water was one of fear. And yet again, Jesus shows compassion, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Then Matthew shows us what a faithful response to Christ looks like through my favourite disciple, Peter. He's my favourite because though he receives much ire for his lack of understanding, he's also the one who really wears his heart on his sleeve. Peter, recognising Jesus, with eyes firmly fixed on him, wants nothing more than to race out to him, a bit like in John 21 when on seeing the risen Christ cooking on the shoreline he jumps straight out of the boat to swim to him! So, Peter, following Jesus' command to 'come', and filled with faith steps out onto the water and walks towards him. But then, taking his eyes off Jesus he notices the reality of his situation and begins to sink. What

are his words as he does so? 'Lord, save me!' Jesus, reaches out to catch him saying, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' I like to think Jesus said this with a smile on his face. Once again Peter is rebuked. Yet once again, it's Peter that was brave enough to dip his toe in the water and take a chance for his faith, unlike the others!

How many times have we, as faithful followers of Christ, started out on that journey buoyed up by faith, only to be met with the feeling of sinking when our faith was tested. In response, we might rebuke ourselves questioning why we don't have enough faith as though it's something that can be quantified. But I rather think that the miracle of Christ is that he will always save us from sinking whatever the state of our faith. It's an amazing story with amazing imagery, a story which mirrors our own experiences of life. Periods of calm and tranquillity, and periods of storm where worry, anxiety, fear, confusion, and panic reign. The wonderful feeling of realising that Jesus' presence is all we need, and yet the dismay of sinking when doubts creep in again. And the maturing of our faith when we acknowledge that our faith alone will never be enough -- that's the whole point of being 'saved', of being plucked from the water by the grace of God.

So there are acts of power in this lesson, but walking on water is just the warm-up act to the main event, a sign and symbol of something far deeper and more wide-reaching. The real power being demonstrated is that Jesus, and only Jesus, has the power to save. Our part in this is to follow the example of Peter who said, 'Lord save me', and then afterwards the example of the disciples' who said, 'truly you are the Son of God'.

Our efforts alone will never be enough, but here's the good news -- they don't have to be! Jesus offers a hand to all those who would reach out to him. So let us also reach out and ask Jesus to save us, that our response may also be 'truly you are the Son of God'.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving God,
in all the changes and chances of our lives,
all the many uncertainties we face,

we thank you that you are a God we can always depend on,
always good,
always loving,
always merciful and always faithful.

We thank you for the assurance that,
whatever we may be confronted with,
your love will go on reaching out,
your hand go on supporting,
and your purpose go on being fulfilled.

Loving God,
hear our prayers for all those in our world
who seek to further your will here on earth –
those who work for peace,
who campaign for justice,
who strive to relieve poverty,
who fight for the hungry –
all those who struggle for the oppressed and
exploited,
the under-privileged and all denied their proper
rights.
Prosper their efforts and grant them inspiration
so that they may challenge people everywhere to
give of themselves in the service of others.

Loving God,
we bring before you the sick and suffering of our
world, all those wrestling with illness in body,
mind or spirit.

We pray for those afflicted in body –
enduring physical pain,
overwhelmed by disabling disease,
waiting for an operation or further treatment
and fearful of what the future may hold.

We pray for those afflicted in spirit –
those who feel their lives to be empty,
those whose confidence has broken down,
those unable to cope with the pressures of daily
life, the lonely, and all who are bereaved.

In a moment of quiet, we bring before you
particular people and situations on our hearts
today, and the needs and concerns of our own
lives ...

Pause

Living God,
speak to each of them, as to us, in your still small
voice of calm,
grant us all your peace which passes all
understanding,
that quiet confidence which only you can bring,
and so may our burdens be lifted
and our souls refreshed.
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We bring all our prayers together by praying the
prayer Jesus taught us ...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

I, the Lord of sea and sky (StF 663)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgLwH5RdtPk>

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord ...

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life for them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord ...

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

Dismissal and Blessing

May God who travels with us along the way of
faith, bless us on our way.
May God who thirsts for truth and justice,
bless us with an insatiable thirst for the truth.
May God who longs for us to enjoy life in all its
fullness, bless us with a child-like delight in life in
all its wonder.

And may God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
guard and guide you,
preserve and protect you,
this day, and ever more. **Amen.**

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