

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Well the Games have begun in Beijing and I guess over the next week the focus of most Aussies will be on how well our swimmers do in the Water Cube. I don’t know about you but I am not much of a swimmer. I may be built like a twig and you’d think I’d float well but I don’t. I did swim across the Murray once but I think I’d drown trying it these days! To swimmers like me the Dead Sea looks inviting!

How about you? How well do you swim? I don’t mean through the water, I mean through life? How well do you swim through life? Do you glide through the water most days or do you thrash about wildly trying not to go under, and cough and splutter most days as you take in water? Do you feel like you are just managing to stay afloat or do you feel like you are going under right now? One minute Peter was literally walking on water and the next second he was sinking like the name Jesus later gave him - rock! Life can be like that.

There are two things that enable people to walk on water. Fear and faith. Sometimes if people are afraid enough they can do things they never thought possible and could never repeat. But it wasn’t fear that enabled Peter to walk on water that day. In fact it was fear that sank him. Rather it was faith, faith in the presence and words of Jesus that enabled him to walk through the storm on top of the water to him.

Fear is the dangerous undertow, the rip that threatens to drag us away from God. Fear threatens to engulf the disciples in their boat. Fear paralyzes Peter so he can’t go on in the water, and fear threatens us, it makes us feel like all we are doing is treading water before we end up dead in the water. Fear makes us tired and wears down our faith and creates doubts about God. To the disciples’ fear, and to our own, Jesus says, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** The phrase **“It is I”** is actually **“I AM”**, the sacred name of God in the Old Testament – the God who made order out of the chaotic watery mess that covered everything at creation, the God who opened up a path for the Israelites through the Red Sea, the God who rescued Jonah when he was thrown overboard, and the God who has pulled you through the waters of your baptism and saved and rescued you for all eternity. This is no ordinary man going for an early morning jog on the waves but God, the great **“I AM”** in the flesh.

Peter grew in confidence at the sound of Jesus’ voice and his words. **“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”** Now if it was me I would have said “If it is you Lord come here and get in the boat with us!” or “If you really are out there stop the storm” just like we often say to God “If you really are out there do something that will prove it!” But Peter doesn’t just ask Jesus to do something for him to fix everything without his own involvement. Peter asks Jesus to tell him to come out on the water and walk to him! That involves him in his prayer, it means a risk of faith for him, not just a quick prayer that Jesus would wave a wand and the storm would just go away. He prayed that he might come out to Jesus through the storm and waves but without sinking. **“Come”** Jesus said in answer to his prayer. **“Come towards me”**.

If there is one thing you notice and admire about Olympians it is how focused they are. Focused for 4 years before their event and totally focused during their event. They have to maintain focus to hear the starter’s gun, focused on every stroke, every step, every shot, focused on the finish line, the ball, the target. Lose focus for a split second and they are gone. Peter got out of the starting blocks OK, he got out of the boat and was going well, until he took his eyes off Jesus. When he listened to the voice and words of Jesus and they stayed in his ears and when his eyes were directed at Jesus he was able to do what was normally impossible, walk through a storm on thrashing waves. But when he took his eyes off Jesus and forgot what Jesus had said all he could see were his immediate problems, the wind and waves, and all he could think about was his own inability and humanness, and all he could do was sink. When you and I take our eyes off Jesus and forget his words all we can see are the problems that we face and that make us so afraid and

paralyse our lives and our faith and threaten to sink us. We have an attention problem. Spiritual ADD – spiritual attention deficit disorder. Our focus wanders. And life becomes turmoil on the inside and affects other people around us.

When we take our eyes off of Christ, stop listening to his word, praying, being with his people, neglect Holy Communion with him and forget the water miracle of our baptism, then doubt seeps in, we lose our focus, our sense of balance, and our confidence. We only see cancer, the grave, and hell, instead of the healer, the saviour and heaven. We only see our own pitiful faith, our sin, and our own resources and not the forgiving love and saving power of God.

Thank God that even while Peter was sinking and spluttering another kind of God given faith kicked in – desperate faith! **“Lord save me!”** he cried out between mouthfuls of Lake Galilee. And even then Jesus honoured that faith, that crying out, sinking, fearful, drowning faith! Jesus still reached out and rescued him. You see it’s not about how great our faith is, it’s about Jesus. In his sinking and desperation Peter remembered Jesus again and looked to him and he received help immediately.

With Peter we obey and fear, we walk and sink, we believe and doubt. It’s not like we do only one or the other, we do both, sometimes at the same time. When Jesus calls him and us **“you of little faith”** he isn’t talking about atheists. Rather he was rebuking people of faith who didn’t use the resources of faith available to them. Facing the immediate threat Peter’s fear was more real to him than Jesus the focus of his faith.

But even when Peter lost focus on Jesus, Jesus never lost focus on him. And he never loses his focus on you. Jesus hauled Peter up out of the water and into the same boat with all the others. This morning as we confessed our sins to him and cried out for his mercy he hauled all of us out of the threatening waters of God’s judgment and back into the same boat full of disciples - the church, the people of God, forgiven sinners. People not afraid now to live and die because he is with us in the boat on Sundays and out on the water with us on Mondays. **“Come”** Jesus calls, **“It is I, don’t be afraid”**. “Come and face your fears with me each day, come and walk through whatever it is that threatens you, come and trust I will be there for you. Don’t be afraid, afraid to live, afraid to die, afraid to take risks, afraid to fail, afraid you will sink. Maintain your focus, your focus on me and on my words. Stay disciplined like the athlete, don’t focus on how hard it is but on me and my words and on the ultimate goal.

Someone asked me this week “how do you prepare to die, and the pain that might be there before it?” Jesus would say “Remember I am the one who suffered and died for you and even when you go six feet under all isn’t lost. I will reach out and take your hand and raise you up on the last day. So don’t be afraid of going under the knife or under in death. Maintain your focus on me, on my sufferings for you and my resurrection for you and keep walking towards me.” **“Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus”**, that’s what I told her **“on whom our faith depends from beginning to end”** (Hebrews 12). That’s what Jesus was trying to teach Peter.

I am sure we will all have much to admire as our swimmers glide through the water in the Water Cube in Beijing this week. But I for one am more in awe of Christians who walk on water during the week. Christians who manage to stay afloat, keep going and push through life when everything is howling around them and they could easily go under. They keep looking to Jesus and believing his words and hearing his call to keep on coming towards him. And I am thankful when I see people like you swallowing your pride to cry out together “Lord save us, Lord have mercy” like we did again today believing he is and will be there for us tomorrow. I look at some of you and I don’t know how you do it. But then I do know. It’s not fear, it’s faith in the one who tells you not to be afraid but look and listen to him.

The moment Jesus stepped into the boat, the sea became calm and the wind was stilled and everyone knew they were in the presence of God. That’s where we find ourselves this morning, the presence of God. So, how will you leave here today? Floating on air six inches above the troubled water in your life? I doubt it. You will still be conscious of the things that trouble you and threaten you and make you fearful. But God hopes that after hearing his Gospel today your focus will be a little less on the threats to your life and a little more on the saviour of your life – on Jesus who says **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** He calls you to walk towards him though whatever it is that threatens you and to trust he is there for you and always will be whether you walk, swim or sink...