

**Romans 10:5-15****Matthew 14:22-33****Introduction**

It's interesting, isn't it, how much our actions show of what we really are like. You'll be familiar with the well-known saying "Don't do as I do - do as I say!" That is because we can put on an act and talk a good image but in the last essence it is our actions that reveal us for who we are and show our essence to people.

Our Gospel reading comes fairly early on in Jesus' ministry - in fact at a time when his popularity in Galilee was at its peak. His disciples had been with him for some time but still hadn't completely realised who Jesus was or what his mission on earth was. It was through his actions that he would reveal himself to them and in this passage we see that beginning to happen.

**Set scene**

John Baptist beheaded. Jesus and disciples went to lonely place to grieve and to rest.

Crowd followed. Hungry Fed. Jesus *immediately made* the disciples get into the boat to go over to the opposite shore of the lake. Terminology gives the impression of him almost bundling them into the boat while the excited crowd was still there. I wonder, why did he do that?

Two reasons

1. In all three accounts of the event we are told that Jesus wanted to go up on the mountain to pray. He'd tried to do that earlier in the day but had been prevented by the crowd. Clearly it was very important to Jesus to spend time alone with his father and he sent his disciples away now so he could be quiet and alone with his father.

2. John tells us that after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand some of the crowd began to say "Surely this is the prophet who was to come into the world" and Jesus realising that their intention was to come and make him King by force withdrew again to the mountain to be by himself. It is possible that the crowd had made the connections that the disciples had missed and Jesus didn't want them to be infected by the misguided enthusiasm of the crowd - so he bundled them into the boat and told them he would meet them on the other side.

You can imagine the conversation in the boat, though, as they set off towards the other side of the lake: marvelling at what had just happened, comparing notes on their roles in the drama, making comment on Jesus and his special abilities. They were well fed and had had an exciting day so morale would have been pretty high.

**Romans 10:5-15****Matthew 14:22-33**

So here they were, several hours later, making very slow progress across the lake. The wind was against them and it was a real struggle to get anywhere. Interestingly they didn't turn to run with the wind or put into the side of the lake until the wind died down. Jesus had told them to go across and go across they would! They were obedient.

However they were exhausted! The lake is about seven miles across and we are told that by the fourth watch they were half way across which means that by three in the morning, about 8 hours later, they had only gone 3 ½ miles. So they were worn out and Mark tells us that Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

You can imagine it from their point of view. Tired out by their efforts, buffeted by the wind, the night dark and stormy and there across the water came a figure - not surprisingly they thought it was a ghost. You can hear echoes of a first-hand account in Mark's words. "We thought he was going to pass by us but when he heard us cry out in fear he spoke to us"

And interestingly the words he used would not only have been comforting but also strangely familiar "*ego eimi*" "It is I" which holds echoes of God's words to Moses and the people of Israel "I am, who I am" the way God described himself in the Old Testament. His words disclosed his identity and brought comfort. "Take courage. It is I don't be afraid". And we are told he climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down. In John's account we are told that the boat immediately reached the shore ... which if the wind died down would have seemed immediate compared to the terrible profitless effort of the previous eight hours. Of course in Matthew's account we hear how Peter asked to be allowed to walk to him across the water and that has much to teach us about the nature of trust in Jesus but I want to concentrate on what Mark had to tell us and what we can learn from his viewpoint.

The disciples we are told "were completely amazed. For they had not understood about the loaves - their hearts were hardened". They had seen Jesus miraculously feed five thousand people and hadn't asked themselves the question "Who is this who can do this thing?" but when they saw him taking control over the elements and defying the laws of nature his actions began to tell them something about who he was and how they could trust him to care and provide for them.

So what can we learn from this story?

**From Jesus**

**Romans 10:5-15****Matthew 14:22-33**

1. His identity was to be revealed in the right way and the right circumstances. He wanted the disciples to recognise who he was - but in the true meaning of Messiah and not as an earthly King to rule on earth. He wanted his disciples to know him for who he was and to accompany him in his earthly mission but he didn't want them to make any mistake about what that entailed. Two chapters later on Mark tells how Jesus began to teach his disciples about his coming death and all that would involve. Following him is exciting, exhilarating even, but it is not always straightforward. That may well be why Jesus sent them across the lake into the storm to show them that life would not always be easy - but that he could be relied on to protect and help them in whatever was to come.
2. He needed time alone with his father and time alone to pray was vital to him. He got tired and exhausted in his ministry, (something that greatly encourages me and yet challenges me) Jesus needed the times of refreshing and restoration that time alone with God brings. How much more do we need that and should discipline ourselves to find it. He knew that he needed time alone to listen to his Father and receive from him, to re-orientate himself in the busyness of his ministry and the demands of daily life. Our own lives and ministries will be all the stronger and more effective if we too can learn to take time out to be with God  
... and not to give up when we don't at first achieve it. Jesus had set out that morning to take time out, to be with his disciples and to pray, yet he was followed by the crowd and their demands took over. His response was to meet their needs; to teach them and to provide them with food and **then** to make space to be alone with his father. If our plans are frustrated and we find quiet time alone with God being squeezed out we need to make space again to be quiet, to recognise time with God as the priority it is and to look for other opportunities to be alone with him
3. Jesus saw the disciples' predicament but did not immediately act on it. He can be relied upon to see and understand our needs but doesn't always act exactly when we would want it. He came in his own time and in his own way. If Jesus had gone out to the disciples immediately they got into difficulties they wouldn't have learned anything from the experience. Except that when they were with Jesus things went OK. As it was they had struggled with exhaustion and fear and in that situation his coming to them was all the more powerful and effective. For us we would often like an immediate solution to our difficulties - and make no mistake God will always provide us with a solution ... but often what we need to learn is in the struggle, the difficulty and the

**Romans 10:5-15****Matthew 14:22-33**

fear and it is when Jesus meets us in that situation that his intervention is most effective and powerful.

In my experience it has always been when I have been my weakest and most vulnerable that God's strength and power has had the most effect. So often he doesn't help us when we want him to .. but when it will actually benefit us the most.

4. His divine power is obvious in his actions and his power over the fish and bread and over the wind and the waves.

**From the disciples**

1. It is possible to see the power and grace of Jesus and yet still have hearts that are hardened. Nearness to him is no guarantee of real trust in him. At this stage in Jesus ministry the disciples had spent months with Jesus. They had seen him deal with demons, heal the sick, raise people from the dead and calm a storm on that very lake. They knew he was special but they hadn't yet made the connections and realized that he was God himself in human form.

Trust comes with experience. It was as day by day they saw that power revealed in Jesus' ministry that they came to know that they could trust in him. Peter saw Jesus doing something miraculous and in a bout of enthusiasm asked to be allowed to join him to walk on the water as well. Jesus told him to come and so Peter climbed out of the boat and made his way towards Jesus. That must have been amazing, a real thrill, here he was doing something his experience told him wasn't possible.

And it was as he looked down at the waves and felt the power of the wind that his faith wavered. How could he do this? Surely he would be overpowered. And as he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the problem he began to sink. That can happen in our lives as well. We ask Jesus to help us with a problem and see him working but as we take our focus away from him and concentrate on the problem our faith wavers and we can become overwhelmed.

For us it is day by day as we seek Jesus' help in our daily lives, as we ask him to guide us, to show us what he requires of us, and as we ask him to give us the gifts and help that we need that we will learn to trust him. And as our trust grows we will involve him more and more in what we are doing. As we see that he is profoundly to be trusted with our lives and our needs and as we see his power at work in us we will increasingly allow him involvement and he will be able to work more powerfully in us and through us.