

Two weeks ago in our journey through Matthew we saw the start of Jesus' ministry, and the beginning of that wonderful teaching to his disciples that we know as the sermon on the mount. That week we looked at the Beatitudes – the Blessed are the ... statements, and we saw how they were steps in the process of becoming a follower of Jesus. Last week we progressed to a later part of the Sermon on the Mount as Liz talked about the 'Do not worry' section.

Today we are jumping forward 7 chapters – not because there is nothing important that happened in them, but because we can't cover all of Jesus' ministry in the 8 Sundays we have left in this series. But let's just make sure we know what happens in those chapters. Well the sermon on the mount continues until the end of chapter 7. Chapters 8 and 9 are stories about the things that Jesus actually did: he healed a man with leprosy, there was that centurion whose servant was ill whose faith was so strong that he insisted that Jesus didn't even have to come to his home and the servant would be healed; there was Jesus calming the storm; there were more healings; there was that story of the calling of Matthew I mentioned a couple of weeks ago; and then Jesus sent the 12 disciples to spread the message themselves; we had some parables as Jesus taught; and then John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and colleague, was beheaded, and when John's disciples came to tell Jesus the news, Jesus needed some space. And that is where our two readings from Matthew started this morning.

How did our first reading start? 'Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.'

Now I wonder what you or I would have done in this situation. One of your best friends has died, and you simply need some space, and everyone and their Aunt turns up on your doorstep – maybe with the best intentions, 'We are so sorry for your loss', 'How are you?' Or perhaps it wasn't just sympathy. Matthew tells us that when the crowd heard it – the news that John had been beheaded – 'they followed him' . . . What were they after – a reaction? – did Jesus know any more? Whatever Jesus's plans were, they are in danger of collapsing. And what does he do? 'He has compassion on them and heals their sick.' Amazing really. Jesus wanted peace and quiet and instead he went straight back to work. I don't know about you but I don't think I could have done that.

And then we get this amazing story of the loaves and the fishes. We have jumped to this point of Matthew's gospel because here we have two enormously important, and often heard, stories of Jesus. And they are all about Trust and Faith. In the first, the feeding of the 5,000, we have this fascinating exchange between the disciples and Jesus. Send the crowds away so they can get food. You feed them. We don't have enough food. Give me what you've got. And everyone was fed.

When we talk to God, when we ask him what we should do and he tells us, and we think, but we can't do that, are we not doing what the disciples did?

Do this! I can't do this! I know! But are you going to trust me?

How good are we at living the life of faith. The disciples were just learning what that meant, and that is what we must do as well. There are many mornings when I get up and look at my to do

list and I just feel daunted. I think to myself I know what I want to do, but that requires this, and that, and the other, and if I am not very careful I simply move down the list and find something else to do which is easier – but probably not as important. And the disciples sending those people away to get their own food was doing exactly the same thing. And of course where they, where I, perhaps where you, are going wrong is trying to do that, 'something' on our own, without God's help, which is why it feels so difficult.

Mark 10:27. Jesus looked at them (his disciples) and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.' But I do think that statement comes with a warning.

Coming back to my to do list again I do sometimes wonder whether there are some things on that list which I have put there, but perhaps they have not happened because God doesn't want them to happen. In trusting God, we not only have to trust that he will help us to do what is on our lists, but that he will help us to write those lists. And that is what our prayers should be all about.

As we start our days, and hopefully we start our days with some degree of prayer to God, we not only need to ask him for help to do, but also for help to decide. Don't just ask God for help in everything you want. There is after all an old phrase, an old adage, 'Be careful what you pray for.' Which rather reminds me of a story I heard the other day.

There was this married couple, a lovely couple, they were married when they were both just 20 and they had lived a wonderful Christian life serving God, and they were approaching their 40th wedding anniversary having just both turned 60 years old. And they had been talking to their parish priest about some ideas they had had to celebrate these 40 years. Anyway the priest wanted to help them, so that night he prayed that an angel would come to each of them and find a way to help them celebrate. True enough, the next day an Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman. "Oh good and faithful lady, what can I do for you to help you celebrate your 40 years of marriage?" Well, she was a bit taken aback but she managed to say, "well I have always wanted to travel – could you help?" And the angel went away. No sooner had the angel gone than the lady heard the letterbox, and she went to have a look. Through the letterbox had been posted an envelope and when she opened the envelope she found two tickets for a round the world cruise. She was simply overwhelmed.

Later that day the angel also appeared to the man. "Oh good and faithful man, what can I do for you to help you celebrate your 40 years of marriage?"

Well, when the man heard what had happened to his wife he realised he should be ready in case the angel came to him – and he was. "Well", he said, "I would really like a wife who was 30 years younger than me." Then, said the Angel, "it shall be. And the man instantly become 90 years old." Be careful what you pray for.

The point of that ridiculous story, which may or may not have been true, is that those two words, faith and trust, need to be backed up by knowledge. The disciples had no idea that Jesus was capable of feeding all those people miraculously, but now they had seen it they were one step closer to believing it can happen, one step closer to trusting that God will do what he says he will do. But however much we believe, however much we trust, we will always be

challenged, and the second of our two well known stories, Jesus, and Peter to some extent, walking on the water was a classic case of someone's faith being tested, and poor old Peter came up short. Peter and the disciples came upon a storm, not just in terms of the weather but in terms of having faith in Jesus. We, I'm sorry to have to say, will from time to time have to travel through storms of our own. And for the rest of my talk this morning I am going to give you 7 lessons to survive a storm.

1. Storms are often encountered in obedience to Jesus. Jesus had sent the disciples off in a boat to give him that space that the 5,000 had deprived him of. They were doing what Jesus had told them and it got them into trouble.
The lesson for us here is simple – we may well be doing what God calls us to do but don't always expect it to be a smooth journey. Or conversely, just because something is not going smoothly don't automatically assume that you are not doing what Jesus has called you to do.
2. The storm should remind us of the promises of God. In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." You know there was no reason for the disciples to panic in that boat. God had a job for each of them to do, and he wasn't going to suddenly let them drown. God has a job for each and every one of us to do, and he will continue to help us to do that job – as long as we remember to ask for his help, and trust in that help, which he has promised.
3. Even when we can't see Jesus, he can see us. The disciples were out on the water, struggling against the storm, panicking, and they couldn't see Jesus up on the hillside praying – but he could see them. Jesus could see that the disciples needed help and help is what he gave them. Don't forget it was dark. It was the 4th watch of the night – sometime between 3am and 6am – considered to be the darkest time of the night – and yet Jesus could see the disciples. If you are calling out to Jesus for help in your life and you can't feel his presence, he will be feeling yours; he will be with you.
4. Jesus comes to us at the right time. 4 o'clock in the morning. The storm at its height. The night at its darkest. Jesus shows up. Our God really is a just in time God. Do you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac where God called Abraham to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice, and just at the last moment, when God realised that Abraham would obey God stopped him – and at the same time produced a ram stuck in a nearby bush to offer as a sacrifice instead. God will help you but when the time is right for him, not when it makes life easy for you.
5. Our fears might be Jesus in disguise. Verse 26, "It's a ghost" when they saw Jesus coming. Do we sometimes simply not recognise Jesus when he comes to help us?
6. The water that threatens to be over our heads is under the feet of Jesus. The disciples feared the water but Jesus controlled the water. Peter nearly got it right. He knew he could walk across the water if Jesus could – until he forgot that Jesus was controlling the water. If you think things are going wrong, ask Jesus to take control of the thing that is going wrong.
7. Our ability to walk is dependant on the focus of our eyes. V28.

"Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Peter stopped looking at Jesus. One other thing to notice here. Jesus doesn't always require long prayers. Here we have one of the shortest prayers in the bible. "Lord, save me." And he did. Immediately. Jesus really is the immediate Jesus. The beginning of this story. 'Immediately Jesus made the disciples get in the boat.' Then the storm, and the disciples panicked. Jesus immediately said to them It is I. "Lord save me".

Immediately Jesus reached out. Do you know sometimes we feel we have to wait for a long time for an answer to prayer, but when the need is immediate, so is the response.

So two stories. The feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on the water. Two stories of Faith and Trust. Those two words that underpin our whole lives; our whole purpose in being here this morning; all of our plans for the future of our church here in the 4 villages.

Shall we pray,

Lord God, we want to have more faith in you; we want to always trust you, but we are only human, and sometimes we don't get things right. We pray this morning that you will help us to get more things right. We probably won't be hungry on a hillside. We probably won't be in danger of drowning at sea. But in our lives there are times when we want to reach out to you and say, 'Lord save me', and we ask you this morning that you will answer us.

Amen