

Jesus walks on the water.

Main passage - John 6:16-21

Jesus walking on water, is one of those images - it can be something, in England, people may say about someone - they can do anything even walk on water. It is something suggesting divinity. In the film Da Vinci Code at the end of the film, when one of the main character, Sophie Neveu has discovered she is a descendant of Jesus, she goes to a pond and tries to put her foot on it and fails...

This event follows the feeding of the five thousand. This event is recorded in Matthew and Mark also. It is the same event where Peter walks on water, but John does not record that part of the story. When we study the bible, when we note omissions by one writer, it can help us consider what is the main focus of this gospel writer.

We will occasionally mention the other gospels as they helps us understand this event. As we hear it, it is familiar isn't it? It reminds us of the previous miracle of calming the storm doesn't it? In both, there is a late crossing of lake and the strong winds blow. Disciples are terrified. And the winds are calmed. There are differences of course - he is in the boat in Mark 4, here he walks on water, there he spoke and the storm obeyed, here is words point to his divine identity.

The disciples after the feeding of the 5000, go down to the lake and they get into the boat. In Mark and Matthew tell us, it is Jesus who tells them to get into the boat and go.

Jesus comes to them in the fourth watch - between 3-6am. Jesus can see them - supernatural insight but also it is almost a full

moon - "for the Passover Feast was near." (John 6:4). Yet for hours, they have been struggling to cross the lake, to reach those 5 or 6 kilometres. Yet he did see them. Mark 6 says "He saw the disciples straining at the oars." (v48). As a writer said "they have never been out of his sight, even if he may have been out of theirs." (Milne, *John*, p.108). And when they see him, some of them experienced fishermen, they are more afraid of the Saviour than of the sea conditions they have been in. The sight of seeing Jesus walking on water, is what does it. "The wind poses no obstacle to Jesus and the waves provide firm footing as he marches across the sea<sup>[1]</sup>"

He says and they hear: "It is I, don't be afraid." We don't need to doubt that *Jesus cares* for his disciples. He comes to them in the dark night. When things are hard. He sees them in difficulty and strain. He shows patience when they seem to miss what it all means and respond in fear. But he does not rebuke. "It is I, don't be afraid." *Just assurance he gives.*

But back to what he said. 'Ego eimi'. It is me! At a camp, or at New Wine, where there isn't much light at night, sometimes you aren't sure who is ahead of you, or coming towards you! But it is more than a greeting. 'Ego eimi' is the divine self affirmation, I am who I am - as God told Moses at the burning bush. And this statement - I am - appears again and again in the following chapters. This is a sign revealing who Jesus is.

John's Gospel is sometimes, divided by writers into two parts - called 'Book of Signs', and the 'Book of Glory'. Book of Signs from John 1-11. Book of Glory chapters 12-end. In this first section are 7 signs - chosen under the Spirit's influence - by John. Changing of water into wine, the healing of the official's son, the healing of the invalid at Bethesda, those are the first three signs. The fourth sign is the feeding of the 5000, the fifth sign, is the

walking on the water. Sixth is the healing of the man born blind. Seventh is the raising of Lazarus. Signs are included for a purpose - of helping people to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that "by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31).

For Jesus to walk on water, is the same as God walking on the water, as heard in the OT - to use just two places...

Job 9:8 says "he alone stretches out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea."

Psalms 77:16& 19. "The waters saw you O God, the waters saw you and writhed... Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen."

God walks upon the waters in the scripture, which symbolised his sovereignty over chaotic forces. Why does Jesus do what he does? It is a theophany - to encourage them, to know who he is. Only God can walk on the waves, when Jesus takes this early morning walk, Jesus shows he is sharing in the unlimited power of the Creator. God is with them. As Isaiah 43:2

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."

And this theophany - God being revealed - occurs not on a mountain - the normal place for a divine vision, such as Moses and Elijah had. It occurs in deep waters, dangerous places, which in Israelite tradition was seen as a place of storms, chaos and sinister powers. *God is revealed in the dark places.*

But we know the sea was the place of Israel's great deliverance wasn't it? God parts the Red Sea and so shows his power over

nature and over humans. And when does this occur - we heard "when the Passover Feast was near." the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and oppression. They went into the wilderness where they were sustained by means of manna. But that wilderness was reached through, the Red Sea as God parted the waters for his people.

"Jesus appears here as the Lord of the waves and seas, the personal manifestation of the Almighty who walked upon the waters at the Red Sea." (Milne, p.108).

And here, after Jesus climbs into the boat, they "immediately they reached the shore." he delivers them safely to the other side to which he had sent them.

Jesus walks on water - recalls OT images of Jesus as Creator and Saviour. The disciples get this glimpse of Jesus divinity, to help them unravel or to be affirmed in their growing understanding of who he is. That he is more than a prophet. This is not a visual stunt. It is a statement that God is among us, that God has moved into the neighbourhood, as John 1 begins.

Why is this important? It sets the scene for the teachings to come in the rest of John 6 - which we will hear in the coming weeks. Just before the boat journey, after the 5000 were fed we heard

"after the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say "surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus knowing they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself." (John 6:14-15).

The crowds have missed who Jesus is. Mark says the disciples did not understand the message of loaves - their hearts were hardened.

So what can we apply?

1. We have been to New Wine, to young adult camps and benefited. We feel we have been fed at his hand - like the disciples did on that hill with the thousands others. But that place has been left. Or is being. Times of strain, challenge we are in, or we go back to, maybe the winds of people or places against us. It says the disciples hearts were hardened. When the difficulties come - as they often come after a significant time of spiritual growth - will we remember Jesus and what he taught us and how he fed us. So easy to forget in the wind.

2. Maybe we feel we are in that boat. Buffeted. Tired. Or we are not looking forward to the boat journey ahead. We have a prayer ministry team. They are here to pray with you, to listen quietly if God has maybe a scripture or image he wants to encourage you with, to stand alongside you, so you don't feel alone. It is easy to fear being vulnerable. What will people think. Only people who struggle go for prayer can be the thought in our heads. You know I met one of my sisters in law at New Wine and she reminded me that to be aware of your weaknesses, and how they affect you isn't weakness. It is greater weakness to pretend it is all okay and all it will take will be a puff of wind to blow you down. It is okay to go and say to these guys - I've had a great camp, but I'm worried about when I go back home or go back to college etc etc. These people are here to serve you in the name of Christ, to help you recognise Jesus presence, to pray for you.

3 Years later, John recorded these events - as an elderly man, who knew those waters and yet saw the Lord he adored and

worshipped walk upon them. If you have been at a camp, or at New Wine, where or how has your appreciation or awareness of the Lord grown. If you have not been, in your past, what moment has there been when you grew in your understanding of the Lord and who he was? Not only remember, write it down somewhere you can find it, in case you forget, but also tell a fellow believer here in this church - why not over this coffee time and encourage them - as John does in his gospel writing.

At the end of John 6, Jesus has done much teaching. Some people who followed him have left. He turns to look at the Twelve - and says:

"You do not want to leave too, do you? Simon Peter replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

May we assured in our following and knowledge of the Lord, so in the winds, waves, strain, as well as in the joy and delights we can say to Jesus - Lord to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life. I believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. Amen.