

Matthew 14:22-33 Peter Walks on the Water.

It has been said that the words “Do not be afraid” or “Do not Fear” are used in the bible 365 times, I’ve never counted them, but I don’t doubt it’s correct.

It seems God needs to regularly tell us to overcome our fears, to trust in our own ability and to trust in Him. At different times in our lives, fear can take hold; fear of starting school or a new job, finding or losing friends, getting married, or divorced, becoming a parent or facing illness or bereavement.

When I look back on my life, I see how fear has dominated many of my decisions to the extent that I’m amazed to have reached the age I have.

A huge decision I made seven years ago was to answer God’s call to explore ordination, this at a time when I could have been putting my feet up. Why complicate my life and take risks when I could have taken the easy route to cruise the world? Answer - God doesn’t give up!

The temptation is to play safe and stay put, but if we want to grow and mature into the people God knows we can be, we have to take chances and face our fears, real or imagined. A plant cannot push itself back into a seed so it grows towards the light, we too have to gravitate to enlightenment or we remain in the darkness, so the first step is to overcome our fear of change.

I am sure that we have all faced big decisions in our lives and stood toe to toe against our fears, we’ve tried our best and God loves us for our efforts, and the mixture of success and failure we have become.

But there are other fears in life too, fears that are beyond personal, they are global. The fear of the pandemic in our midst is almost surreal; we know it’s there, we hear about it constantly, but it’s invisible, unless it has affected someone we love. We know it has caused many deaths, health and monetary problems, it has changed our lives because we cannot freely do the things we are used to. We are fearful of when it will end, fearful of the unknown.

As I write these words I can’t get out of my mind the explosion in Beirut Harbour. The sheer volume of devastation, the injury and loss of life in an area which has suffered so much over the years is heart breaking! It’s hard to estimate the damage done to a country half the size of Wales with hundreds of people killed and over 300,000 made homeless overnight. Even before this catastrophic event, the citizens grimly joked that “trauma” has become part of the national psyche! The word “FEAR” must be ingrained deep within them, so if you do nothing else today, please pray for the people of that land who live not only in the fear of poverty and disease, but also tyranny and corruption. As

fellow human beings, tragedies such as this should occupy, not only my mind, but yours too.

In today's gospel, we hear of Peter bravely stepping out of the boat to walk on water to meet Jesus. There is a consistent pattern in the Bible that shows water as representing death, chaos or evil, all of which coexist in the tragedy of Beirut. The chaos and death are bad enough, but the evil comes in the corrupt nature of the leaders who show no love or care of their people, but turned a blind eye to many things, content only to line their own pockets. There are numerous stories in the New Testament where Jesus is recorded walking on water, showing not only his Divinity but also his ability to conquer the natural elements of his creation and bring order out of chaos. When we learn the Jewish understanding of the symbolism of water in this way, and see Jesus mastering it, we come closer to understanding the hope we have in Christ, that in time to come, he will conquer all things and disasters, wars, hate and illness will be no more.

Bumbling impulsive Peter, recognised that hope in Jesus, who said to him before he stepped out of the boat, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid". Peter wasn't divine, he was human, he had a right to be afraid, but his faith was enough for him to venture onto the waves. Unfortunately, as soon as he felt the strong wind, fear/unbelief overtook him. However, Peter had the sense to pray, showing his belief in the presence of Jesus. "Lord save me" he cried, and Jesus reached out his hand. How did Peter get back to the boat? Did he swim? Was he rescued? More likely he walked on the water, hand in hand with Jesus to support and guide him.

It is when we are at our most vulnerable that Jesus is with us, helping us back to where we should be.

So when life is desperate and you are struggling, either for yourself or for understanding of the world's problems, have confidence in your own worth and belief in God, let your fears go. Jesus will conquer the storms of life with hand outstretched; his calm clear voice bidding you to take heart and "Do not fear.

Amen