

13th August 2023 – Morning Service

Keep your eyes on Jesus

Kingswinford All-Age Team

Call to Worship

Jesus welcomes us all: the young **and the old**; the lost **and the found**; the nervous **and the confident**; the lukewarm **and the enthusiastic**; the lonely **and the overwhelmed**; the tired **and the energetic**; the new **and the long-standing**; those who have little **and those who have a lot**. **Jesus welcomes us all.**

Opening Prayer¹

Faithful and Almighty God, we thank you for being there when life seems straightforward and so predictable – and also in times of confusion and turbulence. We thank you that you are with us when it seems that the sun will always shine on our plans and dreams – and also when our lives are marked by clouds of uncertainty on every side. We thank you for your gentle hand upon our lives; for your insistent voice that calms our fears; for your peace which all but overwhelms us and for your grace which is sufficient for all our needs. Faithful and Almighty God, for all these things we give you our unending thanks and praise. **Amen.**

Song – Be bold, Be strong

Be bold, Be strong
For the Lord, your God, is with you.
Be bold, Be strong
For the Lord, your God, is with you.

I am not afraid
I am not dismayed
Because I'm walking in faith and victory,
Come on and walk in faith and victory,
For the Lord, your God, is with you.

Morris Chapman © 1983 Word Music CCL No. 515642

Introduction to the theme

Before today's reading – think a little about all the places you have walked, all the different surfaces on which you have walked. You will have walked on surfaces that are easy – pavements... grass... hard sand.... You may have walked on surfaces that are slightly more challenging – soft sand on a beach....deep snow... icy pavements... rocky paths... You may have walked on a glacier.....in a desert.....on a swaying bridge over a deep ravine.....on a narrow ledge on a mountain....
But you will never have walked on water!

Reading: Matthew 14:22-32²

[As you read this – imagine you are in the boat – and you can hear the sound of the waves and the wind..]

Jesus' friends were fisherman. It was the middle of a dark, windy night and they were in the deep waters of the lake, in their boat. The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

Suddenly, they noticed something strange on the water coming towards them. One of them screamed! Was it a ghost? Was it a sea monster? How could it be walking on top of the water?
The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

Water was splashing into their faces and it was difficult to see properly. Then they heard a voice. It was the voice of their friend and master, Jesus. 'Have courage!' he shouted across the water, 'It's me! Don't be afraid!' The disciples were confused. They knew Jesus was amazing, but they'd never seen anything like this before! The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

Peter stepped forward and shouted 'Jesus? Is that really you? If it's you, then tell me to walk across the water to you!' Jesus answered him, 'Come on then!' Peter's friends looked at him as though he was

completely crazy! Was he really going to attempt to walk on the water? The waves were enormous tonight and the wind was tearing around their faces.

The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

Peter looked straight at Jesus and clambered off the boat. He kept his eyes straight on Jesus' face. He took a few tentative steps right across the top of the water.

The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

Suddenly, a big gust of wind threw a wave right up into Peter's face. He took his eyes off Jesus and started to realise that he was in deep, dangerous water. He began to sink.

The waves swooshed and the wind howled.

'Jesus! HELP!' he yelled. Jesus held out his hand and pulled Peter out of the cold water. Safely back in the boat, Jesus quizzed Peter: 'Why did you doubt me? I could have kept you safe.' As the wind finally dropped and the waves grew calm again, the men in the boat dropped to their knees in front of Jesus. They had never, ever seen anything like that before. Surely he must be God's son.

Prayer of Confession³

God, You call us to step out in faith, to place our lives in Your hands, and to wholeheartedly commit to following You. We confess that we find this difficult to do. It is not always easy to follow where You lead—to turn away from our own personal wants and desires, to let go of our safety nets and trust that You will provide for us in all things. Forgive us when we doubt You, God. Increase our faith. Open our eyes to see past our own interests and concerns, to Your broader vision for us and for our world. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Song – When the road is rough and steep

When the road is rough and steep	Jesus is a gracious friend
Fix your eyes upon Jesus	One on whom we can depend
He alone has pow'r to keep	He is faithful to the end
Fix your eyes upon Him	Fix your eyes upon Him

Norman J Clayton © 1985 Wordspring Music CCL No. 515642

Song – Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

Helen H Lemmel © 1950 Brentwood Benson Music CCL No. 515642

Drama – Going Under⁴

Jesus: Peter *(No response from Peter)*

Jesus: Peter *(No response from Peter)*

Jesus: Is it as bad as that?

Peter: Mm-mm

Jesus: But you've changed your clothes, you're dry now

Peter: It wasn't getting wet that bothered me. It was making such a fool of myself. Why did you let me do it? Surely you knew what would happen?

Jesus: What have the others said?

Peter: They've been quite good actually, apart from Andrew who keeps making snide comments about webbed feet.

Jesus: Well, your shoulders are broad enough.

Peter: It's not my feet or my shoulders, Jesus, it's my head. Whatever made me try it?

Jesus: Well, you tell me, why did you try it?

Peter: Oh, you know what I'm like. I take these daft notions. I always want to be in on the act and you made it look so easy. We all thought it was a ghost at first. I mean, treading grapes is one thing, but walking on water is out of the question. Then we realised it wasn't a ghost. It was you... and you were walking on the sea.

Jesus: And you wanted to do the same... eh?

Peter: Yes, I did.

Jesus: Why, Peter?

Peter: A bit of me wanted to see if I could do it...

Jesus: And a bit of you wanted to show off... eh?

Peter: Yes ... yes, that's right. But I did manage it at first, didn't I?

Jesus: Yes you did for about five yards. And then...?

Peter: After that I don't remember a thing until I woke up in the boat with James pulling seaweed out of my mouth. What happened?

Jesus: I'll tell you what happened. You stopped looking at me and started looking at the waves.

Peter: I could hardly do anything else. There was a big swell.

Jesus: Remember Lot's wife, Peter.

Peter: Did she try walking on water?

Jesus: No ... but like you, instead of looking ahead, she began to get fascinated by the danger all around her and she ended up being destroyed.

Peter: I'm not sure what you're saying.

Jesus: Peter, I've asked you to follow me. And you can only follow me if you watch what I'm doing and see where I'm going. And wherever I am, there will be trouble and opposition. There will be threats all around you and there will be distractions inside you... doubt...uncertainty...and all the old temptations you thought you'd left behind. If you keep your eye on these things, you'll go under. If you keep your eye on me, you'll stay afloat.

Peter: Is it as easy as that?

Jesus: No, Peter. It's not as easy as that. It's not easy at all.

Peter: Do you ever feel like giving up on me, Jesus?

Jesus: No

Peter: *(After a moment)* Anything else?

Jesus: Yes. It's high time you learnt how to swim.

Reflection⁵

When Peter kept his eyes upon Jesus, he was able to do something that humanly he wouldn't normally be able to do....walk on water. But when Peter took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the wind and the waves, he became afraid and started to sink....

Sometimes Jesus invites us to do things that humanly are not at all easy. Imagine Jesus asks you one day to go and share your faith with your best friend or neighbour. To begin with, while you are focusing on Jesus and what He is saying to you, you might think, "Yes I will do that. It isn't easy but I will trust Jesus to help me." But then you start to listen to the thoughts in your head, which are a bit like wind and waves. You might think things like: "I can't possibly do that." "I might lose a friend." "I don't want to make a fool of myself." Before long, you feel really afraid and you don't do what Jesus has asked you to do. If you had

kept your focus upon Jesus rather than on the thoughts in your head, you could have shared your faith with your friend.....which may well have been exhilarating, like walking on water!

On another day, imagine that Jesus asks you to give a large amount of money away to a Christian project that needs help. To begin with, while you are focusing on Jesus, your heart is willing to give that amount of money. But then you start to listen to the thoughts in your head, which are a bit like wind and waves. You might think things like: "I can't possibly do that." "I might need that money for a rainy day." Before long, you feel really afraid and you don't do what Jesus has asked you to do. If you had kept your focus upon Jesus rather than on the thoughts in your head, you could have given money to the project.....which may well have been exhilarating, like walking on water!

So today, be encouraged to keep your focus upon Jesus. When He asks you to do something that isn't naturally easy, don't listen to the voices in your head, but keep your focus upon Him and enjoy walking by faith!

Response Time

Spend a short time reflecting for yourself on the story from Matthew that we have explored today. You might like to read these questions – one at a time – and consider your answers as you reflect on the reading and the drama.

- How do you think Peter felt when he saw Jesus walking on the water?
- Why do you think he wanted to try it himself?
- I wonder how the other men in the boat felt as they were watching...
- Why did Peter start to sink?
- Does this story feel like anything in your life?
- Have you had times when you needed help to keep going at something that was difficult?
- What helped you?

Litany of Reassurance³

[The words in bold are words of reassurance from Jesus...]

When the wind is strong and the waves are high, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

When our dreams come to nothing, and we wonder what lies ahead, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

When those we love disappoint us, or hurt us deeply, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

When we begin to question God's call, or doubt God's love, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

When we've lost all hope, and don't know where to turn, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

When our faith is stretched to the breaking point, remember the words of Jesus:

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name; you are Mine.

When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.

When you pass through rivers of difficulty, you will not be overwhelmed.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame will not consume you.

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

Song – Do not be afraid

*Ch) Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name; you are mine.*

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) When you walk through the waters I'll be with you.
You will never sink beneath the waves. | 3) When the fear of loneliness is looming,
Then remember I am at your side. |
| 2) When the fire is burning all around you,
You will never be consumed by the flames. | 4) When you dwell in the exile of the stranger,
Remember you are precious in my eyes. |
| | 5) You are mine, O My child, I am your Father,
And I love you with a perfect love. |

Gerard Markland © Kevin Mayhew Ltd CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Intercession⁶

Let us pray....

Think for a moment of a stream, bouncing down the mountainside – clear, fresh and playful, sparkling in the sun. Nothing can hold back its enthusiasm. Let that be a picture of how you feel about the good and joyful things in your life – the people, the events, the daily miracles of nature, the details of seeing and touching. Remember when your spirits rose this week, when life felt pure and true. In the silence, be thankful.....[Silence]

The stream bounces on, full of potential, but inevitably it runs into obstacles – boulders, fallen branches, accumulation of debris. We too run into obstacles that fall across our path – debris from our mistakes, boulders that were too hard to shift, burdens we have been carrying for too long. Name those obstacles in our hearts in the silence.....[Silence]

We watch the stream, not always being able to force its way through the problems but endlessly inventive in finding another way – around, beneath or above. The love of God is inexhaustible and irresistible – in the silence, see that love carrying you over or under or around your personal obstacles.....[Silence]

The stream is bolder now, fuller – and it is joined by other streams that have made their own journey and brought their own character as a gift to others. Who has God given to you as a gift? Who brings grace into your life? Who has brought you the greatest gift of all – the love of God – in a form that we can understand? In the silence, give thanks for these people who have come into our lives and pray for them that they might continue to radiate the presence of Christ.....[Silence]

Now the stream has become a river, growing all the time. There are people in the water, struggling against it, clinging to the wreckage of their hopes, waving for help. We know many people who today feel swept away by difficulties too great for them to manage. In the silence, name them in your hearts and pray for them, that the Lord will lift them up and enable them to float safely in the high tide of his love.....[Silence]

Now the river is broad, mighty and unstoppable, surging to the sea. We are caught up in the power and the purpose of the river. Who can imagine that it started as a tiny stream? The ways of God are huge in scale and irresistible in purpose. He seeks to renew the face of the earth and we are part of the plan – the river, the people of God. In the silence, rejoice in the certain knowledge that the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.....[Silence]

Lord of boundless energy, you refuse to be beaten – always reinventing yourself to achieve the impossible. Give us such confidence in your life running through us and through the world that nothing will stop you achieving your joyous purposes of love, life, hope and justice. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

H&P 687 – When we walk with the Lord

- 1) When we walk with the Lord
In the light of his word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey:
 - 2) Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil he doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey:
 - 3) But we never can prove the delights of his love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour he shows,
And the joy he bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey:
 - 4) Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at his feet,
Or we'll walk by his side in the way;
What he says we will do,
Where he sends we will go -
Never fear, only trust and obey:
- Ch) Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

John Henry Sammis

Offertory Prayer³

Gracious God, You call us to let go of the things we cling to and step out in faith, trusting in Your love and provision. Give us courage to step out boldly, and sufficient faith to follow without fear. Take our lives and our gifts. Use them to accomplish more than we could possibly imagine, so that, through us, Your kingdom might come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **Amen.**

Blessing³

God calls us to step out in faith, to follow where He leads even if what He calls us to do seems impossible. So let's go from here with courage, trusting in God's presence and power, and eager to do God's will. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you and within you wherever you find yourself this week. **Amen**

¹ 500 More Prayers for All Occasions, David Clowes

² NextGenPro – All Age Service: Jesus walks on water

³ Worship resources from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

⁴ From 'Jesus and Peter – Off the record conversations' – John L Bell & Graham Maule

⁵ Adapted from SHT216 All-age talk – AllAgeWorshipResources.Org

⁶ The Second Intercessions Book, John Pritchard