

Genesis 37:1-4 12-28

Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22

Romans 10:4-15

Matthew 14:22-36

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Last week, if the readings from the Lectionary were used, we heard the account of the feeding of the five thousand, this week we have the account of Peter stepping out on the water to walk to Jesus and his subsequent sinking. These accounts occur consecutively in Matthew's Gospel and these accounts are both examples of the salvation the Jesus comes to bring. In the background is the need for Jesus to be alone; alone to spend time in prayer. That need has not gone away during the feeding of the 5000. It is probably even greater now. Today's account begins where we left last week, with Jesus, dismissing the disciples and telling them to leave, having taught them that they can do nothing without him, and then dismissing the crowds after they had eaten their fill of the loaves and the fishes. Some of them may have known that they had been given a great gift of salvation from a small gift of fish and bread. Some had just been filled without realising what they had just been part of. Then finally, after all had left, Jesus has time to pray, and he does so well into the night. But where does salvation come into the story and to whom does it come? For Jewish people, the water of the sea was significant. Even though some drew their livelihood from it, through the simple act of fishing, deep water

represented something that was sinister for the people. Beneath the waters lay all kinds of unseen evil. Sea monsters lurked in the depths, strange creatures swam in the waters, and for the Jewish people the waters were a sign of death, to end up in the water meant that you might die. The depths of the sea were to be feared and to be in a storm on the sea of Galilee, and then to see someone walking across that sea, would invoke greater fear than just the water itself. So, the scene is set for another lesson in Jesus' purpose among us, another lesson in the story of salvation: the disciples were in a boat, tossed about by the storm, surrounded on all sides by the sea, and they see someone walking across the water. At that point, in **their** fear and dread, **they** needed salvation. Then they hear the voice of Jesus "do not be afraid!"

How often do we need to hear those words? How often do we need to hear Jesus say to us, now: "do not be afraid?" I suggest, often. So, you could say that as Jesus came near to the boat, stilling the sea and assuring the disciples that there was no need to be afraid, they were the ones that would benefit from the gift of salvation. That would be true, but a greater and even more obvious act of salvation occurs.

Peter gets out of the boat, after asking Jesus to bid him come, and strides off to greet him on the water. I think we all have a bit of Peter within us. We are suddenly inspired to do something, and we discover that it is a lot harder than we think. Peter needed faith but when he realises that he is walking on the water, and remembers, maybe, that the water is a sign of

all kinds of evil he starts to sink. At that point, without Jesus there to reach out and pluck him out of the water, he would surely die. Peter realises his humanity and discovers his **need** of Jesus. Last week the disciples and the five thousand, get a lesson in the need, for **them**, to have Jesus in their life, as Jesus provides nourishment for them. Earlier in this week's gospel, Jesus shows the disciples assembled in the boat and being tossed about that they as a **group** need him; and then Peter receives salvation as Jesus lifts **him** up out of the water as he was sinking. Peter's salvation was physical as he was saved from drowning and spiritual as he was taken out of the depths of sin through lack of faith and given **new life** through Jesus. Peter was in the water of death and was raised back to life. For Peter, it would be an experience that changed him. He was raised from death through doubt to life thanks to Jesus. He was saved and he was changed. Jesus in his love and compassion had saved him.

So how do we respond to this Gospel. Where do we place ourselves in the narrative; because this is another of those gospel accounts where it is not possible to be a passive bystander. In fact, as people who live our lives with Christ, I don't think we can be a passive bystander in any of the gospels. Where are you in the story? Are you the disciples in the boat, tossed about by forces you can't control? I think all of us, at some point, are like that. The forces of the everyday toss us about and we realise that we should remember Jesus words "take heart, it is I, do not be afraid". Perhaps today **they** are words that we take away with us. Are you Peter,

who with great boldness, steps out of the boat and walks across the water, only to find that, really that is not what you should be doing, and so you need to call upon Jesus with the words “Lord save me.” Perhaps that is your prayer this week. “Lord save me!” Maybe you have come thorough the trials and have been brought up out of the waters. Then your prayer this week could be one of thanks, saying: “Truly you are the Son of God”.

We are there somewhere; but in being there we are all beneficiaries of the gift of salvation. Through Jesus the waters are stilled, through Jesus we are lifted out of sin into life. Not only was Peter raised out of the water and given life, not only were the waters stilled so that the disciples had no need of fear, but the boat was delivered safely to the other side of the lake. Often, we forget that small thing. The disciples were saved, and they were delivered into safety, and maybe this week that should be part of our prayers of thanksgiving. “Thank you, Lord, for calming the seas of our fear, thank you Lord for lifting us up out of sin as you are lifted on the cross, and thank you for delivering us safely.” Amen.