

## Trinity 9 (Proper 14)

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Revd Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew Guernsey on Sunday 9 August 2020

*Readings: Romans 10 vv 5-15 and Matthew 14 vv 22-33*

Since 12 March or thereabouts the headlines have been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. So many people are fearful of Covid-19 infection and its consequences for our health and economic well-being. The world has changed in ways we scarcely imagined. Even though Guernsey is in a remarkable position in comparison to almost every other state in the world, we have our own anxieties. What happens if the borders are relaxed and the infection returns – as happened in the Faroe Islands recently? Will we be able to travel to see family and friends? Will they be able to travel to visit us? What are the economic consequences of keeping our borders closed? There is so much that makes us fearful.

The psalmist cries out in Psalm 69:

‘Save me O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me.’

In today’s gospel, we hear the tale of Peter trying to walk on water. The disciples were alone in the boat; a terrible storm had blown up; Jesus was walking toward them across the water like an apparition or ghost; and they were filled with fear. The storm was very real, and in that small boat they had good reason to be afraid. To see Jesus walking across the lake in the dark, in the violence of the storm, doing what was humanly impossible, must have been frightening.

But Peter ‘gets it’. If Jesus can do that, so can I, he thinks. His experience tells him that whatever Jesus can do, he calls us to take part. So he calls to Jesus: let me do that too! And Jesus says: just come. Peter gets out of the boat in a response that defies all logic. Then his head takes over and the fear floods in. Peter could not walk on that water for one reason: fear. He looked around at the raging storm, the turmoil of the water, the incomprehensibility of the situation, the absurdity of it all, and fear overwhelmed Peter. This is dangerous! I am so scared!

He began to sink. And then Peter did what we must all do. Peter cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

Lord save us. Lord save us all.

The reading from the letter to the Romans today gives us the directions for what we must do to receive that salvation of Jesus. We must ask. We must cry out, ‘Jesus save me!’ We are invited to believe that it is Jesus who gives us life, eternal life. And we cry out. We believe, proclaiming out loud, ‘Jesus is Lord.’

Jesus calls us. He wants us to do amazing things. But the fear gets in the way. The disciples are afraid when Jesus comes to them over the water, because it’s not normal. And he calms the storm, and that’s not normal. So the disciples have to face up to the fact that Jesus is more than normal. Jesus walks on water because of who he is. Jesus calms the storm because of who he is.

We have storms in our life, the things around us that terrify us. We may reasonably fear that humanity is in the midst of a storm at the moment. Mostly, we fear what is going on

outside: our circumstances, our relationships, the violence we see around us. And fear can be justified. Of course, fear may necessary to help people survive. But sometimes the fear grows from the inside. Sometimes our fear prevents us being open to the help that is there.

When the storms rock our boat, when we are troubled and terrified, do we allow for the possibility of Jesus walking towards us through the storm? Are we willing to believe that when Jesus steps in, things can change subtly, and start to come right? Not necessarily all in one go, but the storm may begin to settle.

Jesus had spent the night praying, while the disciples sailed into choppy waters. It was from his prayer that he came into the crisis and calmed the storm. So prayer is important. When we are in a crisis, we pray or ask our friends to pray for us. It makes a difference. God invites us to give Jesus our fear. To give Jesus our troubles. And to expect that calmly he will walk towards us and make a difference, not just for ourselves, but for others too.

And then we too can walk on water, the water that tries to drown us, the water of fear above which we can rise.

Jesus save me.