**Sermon Matthew 24.22-33**

This morning I am focusing on the gospel reading and will do a short talk and then a meditation with you.

To set the scene. Remember from last week’s readings that Jesus had heard of the killing of his cousin, John the Baptist by Herod, and had withdrawn by boat to a deserted place by himself. He was seeking solitude to come to terms with this devastating news, news that pointed to his own end on the cross. But the crowd followed him on foot around the shore and he could not escape them. Instead of getting angry and bitter with them he had compassion on them and he cured the sick and met their needs. Then evening came and he did the amazing miracle of feeding 5000 men plus women and children with five loaves and two fishes.

Now well into the evening, he finally dismisses the crowd, and sending the disciples away on the boat, he is eventually able to have that time of solitude with his father. Such a crucial time of expressing his angst and loss of his dear cousin John.  Did he weep before the father? We do not know. But we can gather that it was a time to draw strength and courage from God the father, a time for refreshment and building up, a time to be reassured by his father, reaffirmed in his purpose, his call, the father’s will, ultimately overcoming all evil, that God will triumph. For Jesus comes away walking in the power of God, the love and authority of God, indeed walking on water.

When we are grieving, we need our times of solitude with the Father. Only after this can we begin to walk again and with God’s grace we can walk where we previously thought it impossible to walk. Maybe even walk on water.

The disciples when they see Jesus walking on the water, are afraid - “It is a ghost”, they cry.  They are already in a state of alarm, battered by high waves and far from land, fearful of their own safety, aware of the absence of Jesus and now this apparition comes through the darkness, eerily walking by. It is true Hitchcock style, the tension building up to a disastrous climax, and Jesus is not with them. The one who has called them on this adventure is noticeably absent in this moment of terror and the disciples cry out in fear.

Jesus calls out to them: “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

A more literal translation is

“Be of good courage, I am [he], be not afraid.”

I am he - εγώ ειμι (Ego eimi)

I am he

This Greek phrase is used many times in the Bible particularly to refer to God. Jesus also uses it in all the John Sayings: I am the good Shepherd, I am the gate, I am the vine, I am the branches, I am the door, I am the bread of life, I am the way the truth and the life. In our reading today and in other crucial places it is translated as “I am he,” meaning “I am God.” Strong echoes of Yahweh saying to Moses, “I am who I am.” I am God. And in the following verse, Peter’s question to Jesus uses the same verb:

“Lord if you are he, If you are God, bid me to come to you upon the waters.

Peter is recognising the sovereignty, the divinity of Jesus, and he gets to walk on the water, albeit for a short time, until the height of the waves replaces faith with fear. What faith. Even with his little faith, he gets to walk on water. That is incredible. Even with his little faith he walks on water, all because Jesus wills it.

How little is your faith? How big are the waves around you? A teeny, weeny amount of faith is sufficient to allow us to walk on water, even rough seas, tossing boats around. Do not allow doubt to paralyse you. Push aside uncertainty, take control over confusion, reach out your hand to Jesus, the I am he, and trust that with Jesus you can walk through the roughest sea.

Let’s hear this story again in the Passion translation, and then go into a meditation.

Amen

**Jesus Walks on Water**

**22**As soon as the people were fed, Jesus told his disciples to get into their boat and to go to the other side of the lake while he stayed behind to dismiss the people. **23**After the crowds dispersed, Jesus went up into the hills to pray. And as night fell he was there praying alone with God.

**24**But the disciples, who were now in the middle of the lake, ran into trouble, for their boat was tossed about by the high winds and heavy seas.

**25**At about four o’clock in the morning, Jesus came to them, walking on the waves! **26**When the disciples saw him walking on top of the water, they were terrified and screamed, “A ghost!”

**27**Then Jesus said, “Be brave and don’t be afraid. I am here!”

**28**Peter shouted out, “Lord, if it’s really you, then have me join you on the water!”

**29**“Come and join me,” Jesus replied.

So Peter stepped out onto the water and began to walk toward Jesus. **30**But when he realized how high the waves were, he became frightened and started to sink. “Save me, Lord!” he cried out.

**31**Jesus immediately stretched out his hand and lifted him up and said, “What little faith you have! Why would you let doubt win?”

**32**And the very moment they both stepped into the boat, the raging wind ceased. **33**Then all the disciples crouched down before him and worshiped Jesus. They said in adoration, “You are truly the Son of God!”

 Meditation

You have just lived through the most eventful of days, and now you are about to experience the most disturbed of nights.

Just remember all that has been packed into the last 12 hours. Remember how you thought you were heading for peace and quiet, but instead were confronted by a crowd of 5000 men, plus women and children. Remember how you thought that you were due for a rest from Ministry, but instead were plunged head long into a fresh round of teaching and healing. Remember how at the end of the day you thought you could send the crowd away, but instead were caught up in the unprecedented and tiring distribution of food. Remember how you thought that at last around the evening fire you could enjoy Jesus’ company, but instead were packed off in the boat to leave him alone. You have just lived through the most eventful of days.

Now you are adrift on the lake in the fourth watch of the night. Feel the boat buffeted by the rising storm. Hear the timbers creek and groan against the tumultuous waves. Peer through the oppressive darkness to see the white eyes of your fellow travellers. Sense the fear rising in your stomach. You have just lived through the most eventful of days, and now you are experiencing the most disturbed of nights.

Now the storm has reached its height. Now your fear has plumbed its depths. How you wish you had stayed at home. How you wish you had brought your lifejacket. How you wish you had more faith. You have just lived through the most eventful of days, and now you are experiencing the most disturbed of nights.

Now you see a distant figure looming through the storm, walking on the surface of the lake. Now you sense a presence drawing ever closer through the darkness. Now you feel the wind suddenly drop, and the waves suddenly still. Now you open your eyes and see Jesus sitting safely in the boat and Peter dripping wet. You have just lived through the most eventful of days, and now you have lived through the most disturbed of nights.

“Exploring Matthew’s Gospel” by Leslie J Francis and Peter Atkins.