

Matthew 14

“...Peter got out of the boat, and started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out ‘Lord save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him ‘You of little faith... why did you doubt?’”

In our Gospel reading we hear a wonderful story about faith – a story about Peter’s faith – perhaps it’s also a story about our faith – a story about the times in our lives when we struggle to hold onto it. I think our reading talks about what happens when we sense that our faith and our certainty is challenged by the unexpected – the frightening – the overwhelming – the confusing - and the disturbing experiences in our lives. Our reading talks about a faith that’s challenged by the experience of sinking slowly in deep water. (That’s the metaphor – and most of us know this feeling.)

When talking about this reading, I often find myself talking about the days leading up to my ordination – a time of great joy and terror. It was a time when my faith in my calling was put to the test (like Peter). But, I can remember other experiences like this as well, over the years. At every stage in my life (in fact), I’ve experienced this conflict – I think it’s part of what makes us human.

As children, we experience this fear and awkward longing over and over again – when we learn to ride a bike (we’re a bit shaky at first). And on the first day at school - that can be a bit frightening and overwhelming. When we meet a new friend or start to learn an instrument or a language – these new experiences help us to grow – they can be exciting, but also a bit frightening, at the same time. The fear and the initial failure of Peter is a very natural experience – any time when we test the boundaries of a calling or an interest or a relationship – these are times when we start to grow in new directions – and it can be an awkward experience (and there will be some stumbles along the way).

In our reading, we’re reminded that our awkward response to faith is a human response. But, we’re also reminded that our God makes the journey with us. On the day of my ordination, with all of my awkward intention, I was asked to commit myself to my calling – to fight the good fight, to finish the race and keep the faith. And, in my response, I promised to do these things, through God’s grace. In other words, we were asked to do nothing on our own (in our own strength). We were being asked to accept the grace of God – a God who meets us in our awkward struggles and makes all these things possible.

This is the truth that Peter discovers in our reading today.

I think, in different ways, at different times, we all struggle with our calling – and experience that sinking feeling – feeling out of our depth. I’m sure we have a few parents here today. Think back to the first time that you held your son or your daughter in your arms. For me, there was joy and wonder and relief – but there was also the realization that I would now be responsible for this new life, (again) through the grace of God.

In our story, Peter’s faith starts to unravel when he feels the full fury of the storm. With the storm raging around him, with the wind and the waves threatening his very life, Peter starts to falter (he

feels out of his depth and he starts to drown). What was so strong and steady becomes weak and fragile (this was Peter's awkward struggle to hold onto faith).

And, in our lives, at times, we too will feel the fury of the storm – we too will be humbled by it – reminded of our frailty. An illness or the death of a loved one. A broken marriage or lost love. Our reading today talks about the disturbing experiences in our lives that can stir up the realisation that we are not always in control – we are not masters of our own destiny.

These experiences remind us that we are human – we won't live forever. We won't always enjoy the company of our loved ones.

I think the example of Peter walking on water reminds us that we are extraordinary and miraculous. Through faith, we are capable of so many things. But, at the same time, the example of Peter's terror and failure remind us of our frailty – our utter dependence on the Lord's blessings. Only through the grace of God can we hope to move beyond the terror of the storm.

Peter is a good man. But, like so many of us, he is awkward – he struggles while growing in his faith. Of course, we see this with Peter at other times, as well. On the night of the betrayal, Peter shows the same confidence when he tells Jesus that he would never deny their friendship. And, at the time, he really meant it. But, after the arrest, when Peter is alone and frightened, he denies Jesus three times. Yes, Peter is a good man, but he struggles with his faith when the storm rages around him.

In our Gospel, the illusion of control is swept away by the storm and only the hand of God restores Peter's faith – Jesus reaching out to catch him before he drowns. And Peter is lifted up – resurrected - over and over again. (These are acts of grace.)

As our reading seems to suggest, at these times, when lost or fearful or confused, God makes the journey with us. When confronted by some of the terrible realities that surround us, like Peter, we can lose sight of our calling. And that's O.K. – it's part of what makes us human. At these times, it's God who holds us and sustains us and encourages us to continue on our way.

Through the grace of God, we endure and grow through these experiences.

And, it's important to remember that Peter was called to live an extraordinary life – a miraculous life, even with all of his human frailties.

Like Peter, we must be simply willing to accept the hand of God when we feel ourselves starting to sink – to have faith that even the awkward experiences in our lives are part of the journey. And, of course, we're also called to share these experiences – the stories of our miracles and sorrows – our successes and our failures. These are stories of Good News and hope.

Again, in the words of our Gospel, "...they cried out in fear, but Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'"