

I'm going to read you a story.

"I'm not going," Matthew insisted, "and that's all there is to it!"

"But it's only a boat ride" said James.

"And it's only just across the lake" added John.

"But I think he's a chicken" sniggered Andrew.

"<imitation of a chicken>" clucked Peter.

"All right! I admit it, I am scared," Matthew shrugged, "and you're not but that's only because you were fishermen before you met Jesus – you know I was a tax collector who's spent all of his time on land so it's no use poking fun at me – you've travelled in boats all your life. And I can't even swim!" said Matthew.

"So, what are you going to do then?" asked Andrew, "Jesus told us to meet him on the other side of the lake."

"Well, I'll wait and go with him" said Matthew.

"How do you suppose he'll get there?" asked Peter.

"Well maybe he'll walk" Matthew answered.

"What, along the shore?" snorted Peter, "That would take ages and he told use he'd see us there in the morning."

"Jesus will obviously have to travel in another boat," James explained, "which means that if you wait for him, you'll end up in a boat anyway Matthew! So why not just come with us?"

Matthew sighed; James had a point – they all did – and there was no use arguing any longer. "All right." he agreed at last, "But try to keep it smooth."

"Keep it smooth?" Peter chuckled to Andrew, "He's definitely never been on about before."

Matthew hiked up his robes and step gingerly from the shore into the boat; it rocked ever so slightly but that was enough to send him trembling to the floor, planting is bottom firmly on the nearest seat and hanging onto the side of the boat for dear life. Some more of Jesus' friends followed, but the four fishermen plunged straight into the lake. They pushed out the boat until it was fully afloat and hopped in soaking wet beside their frightened friend.

"See!" said Peter slapping Matthew on the back with a big wet hand, "We're safe as houses!"

"Yeah," muttered Matthew, "soggy dripping houses."

And the four fishermen just laughed and started to row.

So Matthew was afraid just like we are often afraid of things. Let's see what happened next.

Matthew watched the sky grow dark and the shoreline slowly disappear. He was trying to look calm but inside his head a voice was shouting "What if we tip over? What if I fall out? Let's go back, let's go back now; turn the boat around, please." He knew that wasn't going to happen, of course, not while the others were laughing and talking and having such a good time, and besides he didn't want them making fun of him any more.

"Enjoying the ride?" asked James.

"Not so bad is it?" added John.

"I think he's going to be sick..." sniggered Andrew, and Peter just laughed and made a disgusting noise again <imitating a chicken>.

"No, I'm fine – just fine" Matthew said forcing a weak smile.

But he wasn't fine for long: the wind began to pick up and the choppy waves that followed tossed the little boat up and down on the lake. Matthew shut his eyes and held on even tighter. That voice in his head was screaming now and Matthew was about to scream as well when a big wave washed into the boat and knocking him clean off his seat and onto the floor.

Now, obviously, that's a little bit of a paraphrase of the bible. We don't know that all those things were said, although I can't believe that amongst twelve men, some of whom had had very different sorts of experiences of life before meeting Jesus, that there wasn't a bit of cajoling and a bit of, you know, pulling each other's legs. We even have, don't we, those words where two of the disciples came and said "We want to be the ones that sit at your right hand when the kingdom comes." So there was definitely some pushing and some, you know, playing for position amongst the disciples. That idea there: the idea that some of the disciples perhaps would have a go at some others and be a bit insensitive about their fears and their concerns – we just want to focus on that for a few moments this morning.

Part 3 of our story from this paraphrase of the Bible, the Bible story – it's taken from John Chapter 6 actually. Having sensitivity to others fears.

Matthew open his eyes, searched for something to hang onto; he was soaking wet – so were his friends – and the sky and the sea look like some great dark beast intent on swallowing them all whole. "Surely," he thought, "these fishermen will be frightened now." But no: they were talking and rowing and remembering storms they had sailed through in days gone by.

"Huh, this is nothing compared to the one we got caught in two years ago." shouted James.

"Yeah, twenty foot waves!" shouted John over the noise.

"We thought we'd had it, didn't we Peter?" called Andrew.

But Peter said nothing; he didn't laugh, he didn't chuckle, he didn't joke, and he had stopped rowing all together.

"What's the matter?" shouted James.

"There's something out there!" said Peter, "Something on the water." and the wind whipped his

trembling words right around the boat.

"Something out there?" shouted James, "Come on you're having us on. Come on Peter let it go! Poor Matthew's already terrified - leave him alone."

"I'm not joking!" shouted Peter back, and his voice sounded terrified too, "There is something out there, something I've never seen before."

The others peered into the darkness, but darkness was all they could see.

"Well, maybe it was a flash of lightning or a seagull, or another boat?" suggested John.

"I've seen lightning and seagulls and boats," shouted Peter (and his fear was mixed with anger now), "but that's not what out there!"

And the lightning really did flash; and then everyone shouted and screamed because everyone saw it: a tall white figure walking through the waves.

"It's a ghost!" shouted James.

"it's an evil spirit, surely?" added John.

"And it's coming straight towards us!" said Andrew.

"We've gotta get out of here!" yelled Peter, and he grabbed his oar and he pulled with all his might; and they all did. But no matter how hard the fishermen rowed the ghost on the water kept up with the boat. The lightning flashed and tracked its ghoulish course. It looked as if there was nothing they could do to escape and that's when Matthew shouted: "Stop!"

But now his voice didn't sound frightened or terrified.

"Are you mad?" shouted James.

"He's crackers!" shouted John.

"Keep rowing!" Andrew ordered, and Peter just pulled and grunted.

"No I mean it!" said Matthew, "Stop! I know who it is: it's Jesus."

And the tall figure in white, as they stopped rowing, walked across the water towards them, and said in a loud voice over the noise of the storm: "Don't be afraid, it's me."

I hope that wasn't too much of a surprise to you that it was Jesus on the water, because we've read that story many times.

Sometimes the fact that God is awesome and powerful doesn't necessarily make us feel different about our lives and how we can be the people that God wants us to be.

Part 4 of our story

Jesus has shouted out "Don't be afraid, it's me" to everyone in the boat. Then Peter shouted to Jesus: "Lord, if it's really you call me to come out on the water to you!"

"Come on then." cried Jesus. So Peter carefully put his legs out over the side of the boat and he found that he could stand on the water - this is a man who had worked with water all his life and

yet now he found that as he stepped out he could walk on it. And he did so towards Jesus. And he walked out toward this man who had changed his life; but as he walked he took his eyes off Jesus and started to listen to the wind blowing around him and started to look at how high the waves were coming up around him. And he found that he was started to sink into the water: as he took his eyes off Jesus he was slipping down. He shouted out "Jesus save me!" and immediately Jesus came to him and grabbed him by the arm, and pulled him up out of the water, and said to him: "Peter, why are you so faint-hearted? Why did you doubt?" And then they both got in the Boat and all the disciples worshipped Jesus saying: "This is it: you're the Son of God for sure."

It's easy to be hard on Peter there, isn't it? But he was the one that stepped out of the boat - everybody else stayed in the boat: he was the one prepared to step out. But as we saw often discovered with Peter he was full of good intentions but would so often let himself down later, like he did some months later where he stood with the brazier of coals and he was challenged "You've got the same accent that man Jesus, you're with him..." "No I'm not! No no, I don't know him!" Peter so often let himself down but for me the key point of that story is: Peter knew, Peter knew the power of Jesus as walked towards the water towards him.

Peter didn't have a lack of faith in Jesus, he had a lack of faith in what God could do, what Jesus could do, in his own life. Can I really follow you through these waters of the storm? Can you do that even in my life with all of my sins, with all of my mistakes, with all of my weaknesses and limitation - can Jesus do that? And that's when the grace of Jesus was shown: he didn't say "Pull yourself together!" He pulled Peter up by the arm. And when the storms of life get too much for us that's when the Grace of God doesn't say "Pull yourself together", rather the Grace of God pulls up into God's love and God's mercy, and says "I'm here with you; I'm carrying you through these times."

Let's pray together. Thank you Lord that you are an awesome God - you can overcome the storms in our lives, or you can help us to have faith within the storms in our lives because, as has already been said in one of our prayers, in this world you will have trouble but Jesus said take heart for I have overcome this world and its powers. Amen