

Perhaps it's a dangerous thing to ask when the remains of hurricane Bertha are passing through Bristol, but: Have **you** ever walked on water?

I mean, have you ever done something rather scary in your Christian life? Something where you seemed to be out on your own with no visible means of support? Something where your faith in God's provision was severely tested? In short, have you ever walked on water?

When we get beyond looking for *dramatic* examples from our Christian lives of when we have taken *bold* risks, and begin to look at the smaller forays we make every day, then the question becomes not as stupid as it seems. For all of us *do* take risks in following our Lord; many of us *quite often* step out of the safety and comfort of the familiar surroundings of our boat (huddling against the storms with our fellow disciples) and try to follow Jesus (to be as he was and do as he did) by walking on water.

Everyone engaged in any kind of ministry, ordained, licensed, laying-on hands for healing, leading groups or youth work, leading our singing, playing music in services, leading our corporate life on the PCC or MLT, befriending others; **everyone engaged in any form of ministry** takes risks in following their Lord: Risks that they may fail, or be criticised, or sink under the responsibility, or be choked of their own personal life and liveliness, or simply drown in uncharted waters.

If that risk-taker is you, then take heart from our Gospel story of Peter, trying to be a Jesus was and do as Jesus did, by walking on water.

As Matthew tells the story, Jesus has sent his disciples off in the boat and catches them up "*walking towards them on the lake*" (v25 NRSV), with no visible means of support, no safety net. He comforts them in the storm raging around them "*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid*" (v27). Following Jesus' command / permission (note carefully!), Peter leaves the comparative safety of the boat and successfully joins Jesus "*walking on the water*" (v29). But Peter loses confidence in the face of the strength of the difficulties around him (the storm, v30). When he calls for help, Jesus *personally and immediately* rescues him (v31).

It seems to me that at the heart of this story, Matthew is saying that if **you** are taking risks both in following the **example** of Jesus (being as he was and doing as he did) and in acting with his **permission**, **then don't lose confidence** in the face of the difficulties around you, because if you begin to falter, Jesus is there immediately to rescue you.

That assurance should give us all heart in what we seek to do in following Jesus' example and instruction.

I'd want to emphasise both of those conditions; following Jesus' example and with his permission. Matthew's story is not a license for taking any and every overblown but virtuous risk you can think of in the Church; but warrants only (i) those risks taken with divine permission and (ii) risks take following our Lord (being as he was, doing as he did).

That places quite an onus on us all in our various ministries to seek out and to act with divine permission in following our Lord.

I think that there is another level on which Matthew tells this story.

In the imagery of the Jewish mind revealed in the scriptures of the Old Testament, the sea was a symbol of chaos, of disorder and danger: Here be storms and shipwrecks; Here be awesome leviathans, monsters of the deep. The imagery goes very deep in the Jewish consciousness; thus, on days two and three of the first creation myth of Genesis, God separates order out of primal chaos, the sky out of the chaotic 'seas' and then the land also out of the seas. Here, in picture-language, is the fundamental truth that *it is God who brings order out of chaos*, and then pronounces that it is good.

I think that Matthew is recalling that imagery in his story of Jesus walking on the water in the storm. Matthew is saying that **here** it is **Jesus** who brings order from the chaos, who walks on the waters. Surely this image is being used by Matthew to imply that Jesus is divine; and thereby justifying the disciples' assertion at the end of the story that "*Truly you are the Son of God*" (v33).

More than all that, Matthew is saying that **Peter** is also given permission to walk on water, to bring order to the chaos also; and, if Peter, then also **ourselves** as the followers of Jesus in his body the Church.

This can be further encouragement for us all, as we seek to bring order out of the apparent chaos *of the world* by following Jesus. And, at a more personal level, by acting with his permission and doing as he did and being as he was, we too can bring God's order to the apparent randomness *of our daily lives*.

Both sometimes seem like daunting tasks; and when Peter realised how daunting walking on the water was, he began to sink. When *we* (daunted, losing confidence, or overcome) *begin to sink* amid that chaos, Jesus is there to rescue us, as he rescued Peter.

But first, we must step out of the boat! We must leave the comparative security of huddling together with our fellow disciples in our boat, and **step out in faith** onto the chaotic waters. That is what Archbishop Justin is encouraging us to do on his visit in September; to get out of the comparative comfort of our storm-tossed Church-boats and to take the risk of spreading the Word about Jesus to people outside the Church, living in this stormy and chaotic world.

It is **then**, *when we are out of the boat*, that we become conscious of the power of God to order our chaotic world or dis-ordered lives. It is then that we somehow find the faith not to be discouraged and begin to sink. It is then that we experience the strong arm of Jesus saving **us** from being overwhelmed.

And *all of that experience* is much, much better than avoiding the risk and staying, huddled with our fellow disciples, in the comparative safety of our boat.

Try it and see!

Amen.