



Our Vicar started off by reminding us of our core vision at St Paul's: to be a growing community of grace where God is seen to be transforming our lives and the world around us. For the last two years we have been making that vision a reality in many areas, by God's grace. Now, we have needed to step back, talk and pray to discover the fresh direction God wants us to take: many people have inputted thoughts, prayers and ideas – THANK YOU – and next week we will be giving thanks for the last two years and sharing what the Spirit is saying c. what God wants us to **DO** and also to **BE**:

**HE WANTS US TO BE INCREASINGLY COURAGEOUS FOR CHRIST. Details next Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> September, at a joint Celebration Service for all three congregations at 10am, followed by a shared brunch. Read Mark 6: 45 – 52.**

**1. A Long day in the life of Jesus and the Disciples. Mark 6: 30-44; 45-48a**

- Our reading is preceded by Jesus and His disciples engaging in a very long day's ministry, punctuated by the shocking news of the murder of Jesus' cousin – John the Baptist. Their attempts to get away, eat, rest and recover were thwarted by the crowds, so Jesus continued to teach into the early evening, by which time everyone was very hungry: and we have the miracle of Jesus multiplying bread and fish for over 5,000 people.
- Jesus stills needs solitude: He sends the disciples back to Bethsaida in their boat, dismisses the crowd and climbs the mountainside to pray. It was Passover time (John 6:4) so the moon was full. Sometime during the night, Jesus sees from His vantage point on the hilltop that a strong wind has blown up and the disciples and their boat are in trouble, they are not heading where they intended to go – the wind was against them.

**2. The storm at Sea. Mark 6: 48b-50a**

- The disciples, many of them experienced fishermen, were losing control even though they were in the boat in obedience to Jesus: the wind and the waves were unmanageable, they were being blown off course.
  - Many in our church are feeling blown off course in spite of acting in obedience to the will of God.
- The disciples are desperately 'straining at the oars', the Greek word is *basanizō* which means torture or torment or can be the word for a very hard rock used to pressure test gold ..... the disciples were suffering.
  - We might identify with this word. If so, make sure you have friends to hold you tight through the storm.
  - The C of E is feeling that the wind and waves of prevailing secularism are threatening to sink the 'ship'.
- At about 3am Jesus walks out to the disciples on the water! They are terrified, they think He is a ghost.
- N.B. In Mark's gospel, which is based on Peter's preaching, there is no mention of Peter walking on water; by the time he was telling his stories to John Mark, he knew that Jesus walking on the water was central.

**3. Jesus' Words to His Disciples. Mark 6: 50b.**

- **Take (or Have) Courage.** 'Courage' relates to Latin 'cor' the heart but the Bible has many types of courage: *Hamats* (Hebrew) is about strength, boldness, obstinacy. Paul's favourite was *parrèsia* which is about having confidence, the courage of your convictions. Jesus is using *tharsei*: a command to have courage, to take heart as His gift for the disciples' comfort and joy: they are not alone and their fear is replaced by supernatural joy.
- **It is I.** Greek *egō eimi* but coming from Jesus it means so much more than 'It's me' because Jewish minds will immediately think of Moses asking God His name and receiving the answer: **I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:13-14)** Jesus is claiming divinity, He is saying, 'I am being itself, I am the definition of existence'. He is the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the door of the sheep, the resurrection, the way, the truth and the life, the Alpha and the Omega.
- **Do not be afraid.** Take courage from God Himself. Take heart, we have nothing to fear. Jesus is always with us

**4. The Disciples' reaction.**

- Complete amazement because they still had not understood the significance of the miracle of the loaves. As good Jews, they should have had a flashback to Moses feeding thousands in the desert with manna from heaven. Yes, Jesus has the same Godly power, the disciples were eating, sleeping and travelling with Divinity.
- Let's make sure we have joined the dots, we know who our Saviour really is and remember that the great I AM is always with us. Let's allow God to row our boat and discover how to be increasingly courageous for Christ.

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 Points to ponder

1. Do we really remember that our 'daily bread' ultimately comes from God? Is it easier to believe in a healing?
2. '... A ship was used as a symbol for the Church in early Christian art, so parallels would have been made with the storm at sea and the Church in the midst of persecution. Then, as now, if Jesus is truly in His Church, He will come to the rescue at the right time. We must never doubt Him and need have no fear.' Cranfield: St Mark.

