

Good news: Matthew 14:22-33

Two months ago was my Grandad's funeral and printed on the back of the service cards there was this picture of my grandad - he was walking away from the camera, hand in hand with my baby cousin. I asked my granny why she'd chosen that particular picture and she said "well it depicts Grandad as Grandad, but I think it show us how God walks with us too..." and then she said "often we think we're holding God's hand, but really he's been holding our hands all along".

My Granny is a very wise woman, and I thought about this for a while, so when Tim asked me to preach on a passage that I think is the essence of Good News, you might see why this passage wasn't far from my mind.

You see, there's so much good news in the bible. We call the whole book the good news; "the gospel" literally means "the good story". But this morning, as we look at this passage together, I want to talk about the good news of being rooted in an intimate relationship with Jesus. To me, these 11 verses scream of Jesus' longing to have this kind of intimacy with us.

At first it might not seem that way - the first verse of the passage states very clearly that Jesus *made* his disciples head out in the boat without him whilst he went off to spend time with his father. Because of the climate around the sea of Galilee, these sorts of wind storms on the water can come about really suddenly, without a lot of warning, but I imagine that Jesus - you know - being fully God, was probably pretty certain of the incoming storm into which he was sending his disciples.

We know Jesus never promises us an easy ride. In John 16:33 he even says "in this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Sometimes storms just appear, but I think this passage shows us that, sometimes Jesus sends us into the storms intentionally - why? Because it's in the storms that we get to step out of the boat and walk on the water, just like Peter.

And this brings me onto my next point.

When I was studying this passage in preparation to preach on it, I realised that we can choose be one of two kinds of people in this story: we can be the disciples who so are overwhelmed with fear that they don't even recognise the man they've been following for the past 10 chapters of this gospel account; the man who had just fed 5000 men, plus women and children with 5 loaves and 2 fish not even 24 hours ago.

OR, we can be like Peter, whose faith allowed him not to be frozen by fear of what's going on around him, but is stirred into action to get involved.

It's so easy to read this passage and criticise Peter for doubting and sinking, but that only happened when he was already doing the unthinkable - you can't walk on water (or drown) if you stay in the boat, if you stay in your comfort zone. See, we might even say Peter was the most faithful of the 12 disciples. Whilst the others were busy thinking Jesus was a ghost, Peter asks Jesus to call him out of the boat. Jesus speaks and Peter obeys at the sound of his friend's voice, and he gets himself involved in the miracle that's happening in the middle of the storm.

Perhaps you're thinking "well that's great for Peter, but how could I possibly walk on the water in my own situations?" ...Well, Peter was one of Jesus' 3 best friends, he spent intimate time with him away from the crowds and the busyness of life, and got to know him deeply. I think Peter's faith the step out of the boat here came from having spent that intimate time with Jesus - Peter knew Jesus, he trusted Him, and now he wanted to walk on the water with Him. And it's the same for us - the more we spend time with Jesus and grow with him, the more our faith will stir us to get out of the boat, to get out of our comfort zone and get involved with what Jesus is doing.

I'm going to put it out there and say that this all starts with spending time with God. I've just said that of Peter, but we also see it in Jesus at the beginning of the passage: Jesus had sent his disciples off in the boat, dismissed the crowds, and he went to spend some quiet time with his father. Jesus is the example of perfect intimacy with the Father: his primary relationship is with God and time and time again through the gospels we see Jesus carving out time away from everyone else to spend time with the Father. That's what sustains him, and ultimately that's what empowers him the night before he dies to pray "not my will but yours be done". Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father allowed him to yield to His will, to get out of His own boat, and give his life as a sacrifice for us.

And it's that intimate time with Jesus that means that when Peter sees Jesus on the water, he doesn't just recognise his friend, but he's desperate to join him. He doesn't get out the boat, dance around and say "look at me, look what I can do!" He steps out, and, with his eyes on his Lord, he comes towards Jesus (verse 29). You know, Jesus *longs* for us to have that intimate relationship with him: it's why he teaches us to pray (look at Luke 11), it's why we having this good news book that's full of Good news(!), it's why he died for us, and why he sent us the holy spirit. So that we could spend time with him, grow with him, and walk on the water with him... that's good news right?!

So now Peter's out the boat, he's walking on the water, probably being cheered on by the other 11 disciples who now realise it's Jesus, and who are probably wishing they had the guts to have a go themselves, and then he looks at the storm and he gets scared again. We see in verse 30 that his immediate reaction

is to cry out "Lord, save me!" Because he knew Jesus, he knew what Jesus could do, and Peter was dependent on him. So Jesus stretches out his hand, he pulls Peter back onto his feet, and hold his hand. Because - good news for us - Jesus NEVER lets us sink. They walk back to the boat together, hand in hand, and Jesus says (verse 31) "you of little faith, why did you doubt". I don't think Jesus was telling Peter off here - in such an intimate position of walking hand in hand, I think the conversation might have gone more like this: oh Pete my friend, you silly billy, I told you faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains, so why did you doubt me - you know I'm stronger than the storms! Because we don't disappoint Jesus when we get it wrong, but he wants us to know that fixing our eyes on him is the way to walk on the water. As it says in Hebrews 12:1-2 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith." Therefore, look at the people around you, see and listen to their glory stories; let go of the baggage that's holding you back inside the boat; lock eyes with the Father and come towards him.

I started by saying that sometimes Jesus sends us into the storms. We see here that as soon as Jesus and Peter get back into the boat together, the storm dies down. So whether or not Jesus made the storm happen so he could teach the disciples a lesson, or so that many book, sermons and analogies could be made from the incident, I think that storm was pretty purposeful. Because it shows us that no matter what is going on around us, if we can stand firm knowing who's holding our hand, we can weather the storm and still be standing when the storm passes.

We often find ourselves in storms - whether that's a little gale or a full blown hurricane. It can feel impossible, it can feel hard to see Jesus in the situation, but if we have the faith to step out of the boat, we get the opportunity to grow in intimacy with Jesus. We get the opportunity to do the impossible, to join in with the miracle, to walk on the water hand in hand with God. And you know, sometimes we might start to sink - we're only human, we all get things wrong, we look at the surrounding storm and forget that Jesus standing right next to us - but when we do start sinking, we'll realise that Jesus is still holding us by the hand, and he pulls us back on our feet, and leads us to safety. And when the storm passes, we'll rejoice, just like the rest of the disciples, because with our eyes fixed on Him through the storm we'll have seen a little bit more of who He is, a little bit more of what He can do, and we'll have grown a little bit more intimately with Him. As we go, I think we see more and more of what my Granny said - that we often think we're holding onto God's hand, but really he's been holding ours all along. And I think that is excellent news.