

WORSHIP SERVICE FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS
9th August 2020.

Welcome/Introduction: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Welcome to our worship service this morning, members of Shepparton Uniting and Shepparton Rural Congregations. To those who are joining us via social media and those who have received the hard copies of this service.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of this land on which we live, work and worship. To their elders and members past, present and emerging.

Call to Worship:

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard in all your ways.

Let us worship God.

Hymn: 557 (AHB) 'Lord of creation'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

O God who is Love full of grace, we join your heavenly beings and all of creation in singing your praise and giving you thanks. Your ways are a wonder and your works are mighty. You saved your people from bondage in Egypt, you save your people from the flood in the days of Noah and you saved your disciples from the stormy Galilean Sea. Most of all, we thank you for saving the whole of creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son our Redeemer. And, in the power of your Holy Spirit you continue to sustain your creation in faith and hope to the glory of your name.

Merciful God, we confess our slowness to see you coming to us in the midst of the storms of life. We are sorry for our failure to recognise you as the Lord of creation. That we claim to walk with you and follow you but fail to remember your promise that you will always be with us, and you will never leave us. Renew our faith and lift our spirits in this time of great sadness, grief and anxiety.

In Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

Declaration of forgiveness:

Hear the good news of the Gospel – Jesus Christ has come, is coming, and will continue to come to save. You hold this faith. I now declare to you all, your sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Readings: Mathew 14: 22-33 (NRSV)

Message:

I am not certain how many times I've preached from this text – Mathew 14: 22 – 33, and how many times I've reminded congregations about Peter's courage in leaving the boat and

the other disciples to walk on water, and how Peter fail to focus on Jesus that he sank, and of course how he cried out for help and Jesus grapped his hand and saved him.

I am sure many more preachers have preached along a similar interpretation of the text, and I'm also sure that many more will do so today. Highlighting Peter's courage, his failure at not focussing on Jesus, and his rescue by Jesus. No sooner did they get into the boat, all was well.

It is a good encouragement for people today especially in this unprecedented time, to put their faith into action and maintain your focus on Jesus.

I would like to suggest this morning that a little in-depth reflection on the text may reveal something more about the text and may be a little different from what you might hear today.

We do know that there is another story of Jesus calming the storm in Mathew 8: 23 – 27, where the storm swamps the boat during a fierce storm and the disciples were afraid for their lives whilst Jesus lay sleeping in the boat. Jesus was in the boat. They tried to wake him up and asked "Lord, save us!" And what did Jesus say to them? He called them "ones of little faith," then he commands the wind and the seas to be calm. In their amazement, they asked, "what sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

In our text today, Jesus is not in the boat. He had to stay back and dismissed the crowd, the five thousand men plus women and children that had just been fed before he went up the mountain to pray. He is not in the boat sleeping; he is up on the mountain praying. But he had already sent the disciples on a boat to the other side. This time there is no storm and the disciples are not afraid of the wind.

What they are afraid of this time is the *phantasm*/phantom, a ghost walking on water coming toward them. As seasoned fishermen, they had never encountered or experienced anything like that before. They have encountered wind and storm of many kinds before but nothing like this. They cried in fear and immediately Jesus replied to them, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Then Peter, who else? He said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Here Peter's request is for Jesus to identify himself by allowing him to walk on water too. Despite many who are making out that Peter is a hero, the courageous one who dare to leave the boat, notice what Peter said. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

That line of testing sounds too familiar doesn't it? "Lord, if it is you?"

You may recall the story of Jephthah in the Book of Judges chapters 11 and 12. In Chapter 11: 30 Jephthah made a promise to the Lord "If you give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me ... I shall offer it up as a burnt offering".

What happens after he return from his victory against the Ammonites is that his only daughter, his only child came dancing to meet him.

Satan used the same kind of testing in the wilderness in Mathew 4: 3 "If you are the Son of God" and again in verse 6 "If you are the Son of God".

Here, in our passage today Peter uses the same Satanic line of testing "If it is you..."

Somehow Peter may have missed what Jesus said earlier in 14: 27 "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid". May be Peter was not convinced that he had to test the seemingly ghostly figure. "Lord, if it is you...". "Come" said Jesus and Peter started to walk on water but noticing the wind, he became frightened again and began to sink.

To his credit, Peter cried out, "Lord, save me". This time, Peter realised that if he is to be saved, only the Lord can save him. Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him.

Now you see why I am reluctant to make Peter out as the courageous hero in our story. Jesus' response to Peter is to call him "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Remember Jesus said the same to the disciples in the boat in chapter 8: 26 "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased and for the first time in Mathew's gospel the disciples worshipped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God".

You see, the point I'm trying to make is that Jesus is the real hero. Whether he is in the boat sleeping during our stormy nights or coming toward us walking on water early in the morning. He is the One who has come, is coming and will continue to come to save his people.

He may be with us during the storm, and he will wake to calm our troubled minds and souls, or he will come to us after he had sent us to other side on a mission whilst he is praying for you and for me from on top of the mountain. But he will surely come to us in the dawn of a new day with his comforting words "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

There are many who have testified to the reality of this Lord who is with us and who is coming. Augustus Toplady was caught in a stormy night travelling along a gorge in Burrington. He found a gap in the gorge, where he wrote the original words of the hymn "Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee".

On September 4th, 1847 Henry Frances Lyte who had been plagued by ill health all his life, stood in the pulpit of his church and preached his last and farewell sermon. On the same afternoon, he wrote "Abide with me, fast falls the even tide".

Sarah Flower Adams had many storms in her life. When her minister was looking for a hymn that will help his sermon on the God who came to Jacob in a dream in Genesis 28, she wrote "Nearer my God to Thee".

If I can encourage you at this very challenging time, it is this: The God who came is the One who is coming, and that God will come. He hears your call "Save me Lord", he will lift us up and together we will join the company of the faithful in the boat on a mission of saving the world. God will come riding on a storm or God will rest amidst our troubled souls, but God will not let us drown. He is the Lord of creation that we sang about in our first hymn.

That God, the Lord of creation. The One who can command the wind to stop is the One who is coming to save. It is not our heroism nor our elitism. It is not our creativity nor our success that saves us. It is really the One who is already with us and is coming to us where we are that saves. As Charles Wesley puts it: "Not the labours of my hands can fulfil thy law's demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow, all for sin could not atone thou must save, and thou alone.

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer of Intercession:

Most merciful God, we bring to you our prayers for your world and its people.

As you came long ago to your disciples in the midst of a storm, come today to your people tossed about in the tempests and troubles of life, that our faith may be rekindled by your presence.

We bring our prayers for this community: for all who are in violent or abusive relationships; for street-children and all who have no homes; for the young people in our aboriginal community that are crying out for freedom and sovereignty, for all who are unable to care for themselves and are most vulnerable to the corona pandemic, for our family and friends, and all with whom we share our daily lives.

As you came long ago to your disciples in the midst of a storm, come today to your people tossed about in the tempests and troubles of life, that we may draw strength from your presence.

We bring to you our prayers for all who are in need: for all without family and friends; for all who mourn the loss of those they love; for all who are afraid, confused or without hope; for the sick and all who care for them.

As you came long ago to your disciples in the midst of a storm, come today to your people tossed about in the tempests and troubles of life, that our terrors may be calmed by your presence.

Merciful God lift us up into your very presence that we may find everlasting peace and joy.

O Lord Jesus Christ

hear our prayer.

Hymn: 139 (AHB) 'Jesus, lover of my soul'

Blessing: (Aaronic)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.