

How many times have we heard the message that Jesus is with us in the midst of our troubles. How many times have we nodded our heads and said 'yes, we know'? But do we?

How many times have we actually witnessed his presence in our own troubles? I bet we can all bring such times to mind – times when we felt completely battered like the disciples on the boat in our Gospel reading, times when we've felt as if we're sinking like Peter, times when we've wanted to hide in a cave like Elijah... and then God steps in and reaches out a helping hand – just as Jesus stretched out his hand to Peter. We get to the other side of our problems, look back and feel heartened, blessed, encouraged, safe. But for how long?

What happens when the next storm hits? Has our faith been strengthened so much that we say, its ok, I can get through this – God is with me. Emmanuel. Or do we go through the same process of sinking before we remember to cry out to Him again and look for that outstretched arm....

We all do it. We bask in the wonder of His love and then gradually life returns to normal and it's all a distant memory.

It was the same for the disciples. They witnessed first-hand the miracles that Jesus performed but they still feared when the storm hit. Indeed, the reading this morning follows on from him feeding the 5 thousand with a few loaves and fishes.... But still the disciples panic when the storm hits. They don't even recognise Jesus at first when he starts to walk towards them on the water and think it must be a ghost.... Do we always recognise Him when he walks towards us?

Peter calls out to Jesus and says 'if it is you, call me and I'll walk towards you'. Jesus calls, Peter steps out of the boat in faith... then starts to sink. Why? Because despite knowing that Jesus is there, despite knowing that He is the Son of God, despite having witnessed so many miracles.... He panics and forgets to trust. Jesus reaches out his hand, Peter takes it... and all is well again.

It was the same for Elijah in our Old Testament reading. He had seen God act. He knew that God was mightier than any earthly enemy yet what did he do when his life was in danger? He hid in a cave.

Fear, we're told, is part of the human condition. It can control us, it can make us behave irrationally; it can make us run away from a difficult situation; it can drag us into the deepest and darkest of places – yet at the point of fear, rather than retracting, we need to look for the light of Christ because Jesus offers an invitation to us: 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid'. We are invited to abandon ourselves to Him in the midst of the storms and fears of life and in doing so, not abandon ourselves to fear. Easier said than done.



Window in Christ Church depicting Jesus walking on the water.

So I leave you – and me - with a challenge. Not the one you may expect of stepping out of the boat and trying something new or taking a risk – but rather one of strengthening our faith by calling to mind the things God has done in our lives. Think back to a time when you struggled but cried out to God.... and he sent Jesus to meet you. It may be recent – we've all been through some very testing times recently – or it may be longer ago. Write it down. Put it somewhere safe – maybe tuck it into your bible with this reading – and make a point of reading it every time you come across it. Develop the habit of saying Emmanuel – God is with me – as you enter each day. Look for him, expect Him to turn up in your mess and muddle and let him lead you out.

