

Closing Prayer

God of all power,
your sovereign word comes to us in Christ.
When your Church is in danger, make firm our trust;
when your people falter, steady our faith.
Show us in Jesus your power to save,
that we may always acclaim him as Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 19, A³

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 14.odt • 2020-06-17

³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

Proper 14

(Sunday between 7 to 13 August inclusive)

Principal Service readings

1 Kings 19.9-18	Elijah encounters God at Horeb
Psalms 85.8-13	The message of God is for justice and peace
Romans 10.5-15	The testimony of Moses, and lack of response of Israel
Matthew 14.22-33	Jesus walks on the water

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus walks on water

Immediately after feeding the crowd with the five loaves and two fish, ²²Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

²⁸Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' ²⁹He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Matthew 14.22-33 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

The episode of Jesus walking on the water appears in three gospels (Mark 6.45-52; John 6.16-21), but Matthew has a unique version of the story. It is only Matthew that has Peter on the water with Jesus, and then sinking due to lack of faith. It does not take much imagination to see that the boat represents the church – Matthew's is the only gospel to use the term 'church', and to note that Peter, as the leader of the twelve, is dependent on Jesus' help. The boat itself is buffeted by the storm, but when Jesus comes on board the storm subsides and the waters become calm.

We are told that the storm occurred during the fourth watch of the night, that is, between 3.00am and 6.00am. We might wonder what the twelve were doing sailing at that time of night, especially during a storm. The answer is the Jesus had commanded them to meet him at the other side. The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long by eight miles wide. Sudden storms were a feature of the area, and still are today. Even the shortest distance can become treacherous. When Jesus gets into the boat the wind drops. It is reminiscent of the words of God to Isaiah: 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you' (Isaiah 43.2). Although the disciples are seen in a more positive light than in Mark's version, they are still criticised for being 'of little faith' (14.31). However, they do have a sudden realisation that Jesus is the Son of God (14.33), whereas in Mark's account the disciples remain unmoved (Mark 6.52).

There is a rich biblical background to the story. Psalm 107.23-32 tells us that the Lord 'made the storm be still', and something similar occurs in Jonah 1. Jesus goes beyond stilling the storm and walks on the water, showing that he does what God does, 'who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea' (Job 9.8). The motif of God walking on the waters appear in the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the sea.² The episode thus conveys an implication about the divinity of Jesus. Peter sinking into the waves also has a rich biblical background, such as Psalm 69.2, 'I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me' (see also Jonah 2). In rescuing Peter, Jesus does

² See Exodus 14.13-31; Psalm 77.20; Isaiah 43.16; 51.10; Habakkuk 3.15.

what customarily God does: 'Stretch forth your hand from on high, rescue and deliver me from the many waters' (Psalm 144.7). Such symbolism raises questions about the historical basis of the account. It is difficult to draw a boundary between the literal and the symbolic. However, the heart of the story is in the recognition of the disciples that Jesus is the Son of God.

Quotations

1

Faith is the ship, fear is the ocean, courage is the captain.

Matshona Dhlwayo

2

After all the shattering discoveries of science and conclusions of philosophy, mankind has still to live with dignity amid hostile nature, and in the presence of an unknowable power, and mankind can only succeed in this tremendous feat by the exercise of faith and of that mutual goodwill which is based in sincerity and charity.

Arnold Bennett, 1867–1931

3

Salvation does not depend upon outward things, whether they are many or few, small or great, splendid or lowly, glorious or mean, but upon the soul's virtue, upon faith, hope, love, brotherliness, knowledge, gentleness, humility and truth, of which salvation is the prize.

The exhortation to the Greeks / The rich man's salvation / To the newly baptized
/ Clement of Alexandria, 150–215

Related topics

For further study:

Faith; prayer; mystery of the church; Christology; Jesus fully human; Jesus fully divine; discipleship; paschal mystery; mystery of suffering; God's love; sacraments of the sick and holy orders; conversion