

Sermon for Sunday 8th August 2026

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28; Matthew 14:22–33

(NRSV quotations)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Although our first reading is full of those human emotions that can get us into so much trouble, jealousy, anger, fear, pride, it is our gospel reading I would like to focus on. If our first reading has betrayal at its core, our gospel reading is a story of faith. Yet both readings ask us the same question:

Where is God when fear seems to have the upper hand?

So let us take a look at Matthew's Gospel.

The disciples are in trouble. Their boat is being battered by waves, **"for the wind was against them."** They are far from the safety of land. They have spent hours struggling alone. It is not until the night is at its darkest, during those hours just before dawn, that Jesus comes to them.

And their initial immediate reaction was a reflection perhaps of their state of mind. They were frightened, panicking, out of ideas and their eyes and brains do a classic version of "computer does not compute". This was highly unusual Rabbinical behaviour.

The disciples didn't see hope.

They didn't see rescue.

They didn't see an end to their torment.

Their brain tells them: GHOST and they cry out in fear.

"...immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'"

Isn't it amazing how often those very words echo throughout Scripture. "Do not be afraid." They are spoken to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and now to frightened fishermen.

Fear narrows our vision. It makes us mistake Christ's presence for something terrifying. The disciples cannot recognise the very one who is coming to save them.

Peter, characteristically impulsive, responds:

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

Jesus simply replies:

"Come."

Peter climbs over the side of the boat and, for a few astonishing moments, does the impossible. He walks towards Jesus.

But then Matthew tells us,

"But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"

Peter's mistake was not stepping out of the boat. His mistake was shifting his attention from Christ to the storm.

This speaks powerfully to our own discipleship.

We live in anxious times. News headlines speak of conflict, economic uncertainty, loneliness, declining trust, environmental concerns and divisions within society. Our personal lives also contain storms that no one else fully sees. When I was thinking about this reading earlier this week, I remembered a teenage experience that up till today I had not shared with anyone. Not even my sister.

Many years ago, as a young teenager, I had my first experience of ice skating. As I walked on to the ice doing a remarkable interpretation of Bambi, the thought furthest from my mind was that I could possibly be a danger to anyone. I was struggling to even remain upright. But I was young, so the basics came fairly easily and then, as all teenage boys can testify to, the devil of over confidence starts to awaken. By this point I was able to skate fast enough to be dangerous with just two very small obstacles – I couldn't turn and I couldn't stop. The barriers had literally become my crash barrier.

So, there I was, skating up the rink in my straight line, picking up speed, having enormous fun when horror of horrors right in front of me crossing my skating line was this father and his young daughter holding hands. I couldn't stop, I was unable to make any turns, collision was inevitable. So I did what we Christians tend to do in such circumstances – I closed my eyes and prayed and waited for the inevitable carnage. Some five, ten seconds later, I opened my eyes and saw the father and daughter still standing upright but somehow they were now behind me. I have absolutely no explanation for how that happened. I still

don't. Because I couldn't explain it, it's a story that remained untold until today. I can tell you my relief was palpable and I took the opportunity to remove myself from the ice whilst I was still ahead.

In our readings, Peter begins to sink not because the wind becomes stronger, or because the waves have got higher, but because fear becomes stronger than trust.

And yet notice what Jesus does.

"Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him."

Immediately.

Jesus does not stand at a distance waiting for Peter to learn a lesson first. He reaches out.

That is grace.

Even Peter's faltering faith is enough to cry, ***"Lord, save me!"*** And that short prayer is answered.

Perhaps that is one of the greatest encouragements for us. The strength of our salvation does not depend upon the strength of our grip on Christ, but upon the strength of Christ's grip on us.

Unlike Peter, Jesus never lost faith in his Father. He passed through betrayal, suffering and death itself, emerging victorious in the resurrection.

Because Christ has entered the deepest pit and the darkest storm, there is nowhere we can go where he has not already been before us.

So perhaps the invitation today is not simply to admire Joseph's perseverance or Peter's courage.

It is to hear again Christ's words spoken personally to each one of us:

"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Whether we feel ourselves trapped in Joseph's pit or struggling in Peter's storm, or heading for disaster on an ice-rink, Christ comes to meet us.

He comes not always to calm the storm immediately, but always to be present within it.

And sometimes that presence is enough to give us courage for the next step.

May we therefore keep our eyes fixed not upon the storms and the winds that surround us, but upon the Lord who reaches out his hand, holds us fast, and leads us safely home.

AMEN