

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

When I was a child we used to go as a family to the Island of Arran, and on top of the car that was towing the caravan we took our Mirror Dinghy – a wooden small sailing boat. I was never so keen on the sailing (fear of the “ready about Leo” and the boom swinging towards your head – I can’t imagine why that worried me!) but I grew to enjoy rowing. My dad was very encouraging (and somewhat cautious!) – we’d start off in the bay at Lochranza with me learning to row with my dad, and then on my own, but with the boat tied to the shore with a LONG rope, and then on my own, but always with my dad poised to do something (I’m not quite sure what but he was there and that was reassuring!). I never capsized or got lost (although I seem to remember my dad and his friend capsizing (when they were roped to the shore!)) but I was sure that there was someone watching out for me! And that was good.

Our passage today follows on immediately from Jesus feeding the 5,000 which we read last week. It had been a full on day, providing food for everyone, and interestingly, rather than feeding the 5,000 and leaving the disciples to mop up after him, Jesus sends his disciples away to the boat to cross to the other side, and he himself sends the crowds on their way. I can’t imagine that was a short process, and I imagine it was a time filled with amazing conversations and moments. Often, it’s after the event that the best conversations are had!

So, after the crowds dispersed, Jesus took some time out and went up the mountain to pray – we know that Jesus was trying to process the death of John the Baptist, so he was keen for some space after all the company, ...to refresh his soul (which we all try to do in different ways – I know our boys hope to climb Blencathra some time over the next few weeks – that should either refresh or exhaust them!)

And while Jesus was praying and resting, down on the sea, a storm was raging – the waves rolling, and the disciples were, I imagine petrified, and probably very scared for their lives.

And then, early in the morning, amidst the storms and raging and waves and wind, they catch sight of something or someone crossing on top of the water towards them...And they are even more afraid – was it a ghost? And Jesus just spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid”. No fuss, no drama, just calm and love.

And so Peter, amidst the storm, perhaps enthused and fired up by the storm and the image of Jesus coming towards him on the water says, well, if it’s really you, command *me* to walk on the water to you....and so Jesus simply says “**come**”. And he did. Peter stepped out of the boat and walked towards Jesus. How amazing is that? But the only thing was that suddenly Peter realized what he was doing, he heard the wind, and saw the waves, and lost his nerve, and began to sink. And as he did, he called out to Jesus to save him. And Jesus simply reached out his hand, caught him and brought him to safety saying, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ When Jesus and Peter got back into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’

Jesus came towards Peter in the midst of the storm and reassured him of his presence. And being reassured, Peter felt drawn toward Jesus – Jesus said just one word! Come! He didn’t tease him, he didn’t force him, he didn’t strike a bargain with him, he didn’t even bribe him, he just said “Come”. And so, Peter went....

I love this image of Peter stepping out of the boat – stepping out of the relative safety of the boat and onto the sea. There wasn’t calm, rather there were turbulent waves and wild winds. But he saw Jesus, felt drawn to him and walked towards him.

And so, amidst the storm, Peter stepped out the boat and walked to Jesus, and that was good – that was a fantastic leap of faith, drawn to his friend who he loved and trusted. But then, the tricky bit about this is that Peter lost his nerve, for the storm was still raging all around him, the wind was blowing, the rain was lashing (does it do that there? I'm not sure), and I imagine his heart was pounding! He lost focus on where he was going and who he was going to.... But all wasn't lost...far from it! Jesus didn't abandon him, but without fuss or drama, he stretched out his arm and scooped him up and brought him to safety.

Life can feel a bit of a rollercoaster at times, a bit rocky, a bit tumultuous at times, not always bad, but rather unknown and unsettling, and often out of our comfort zone. 😊 We can feel like we are moving in directions which are perhaps not all in our control, but which we are certainly right in the heart of and feel compelled to be part of!

Sometimes on our journey of life Jesus calls us to step out of the boat, to take a leap of faith and to go where God calls us. We don't thankfully all get called out of the boat at the same time, for that would be tricky! Who would man the boat! But at different times and in different ways and for different purposes and based on our many different gifts and talents, God calls us (often little more than a persistent whisper or nagging nudge!) and we have a choice to make – do we listen to that call on our lives or do we carry on doing what we're doing because that's what we've always done. It's all I guess about trust – trusting that God calls us for a reason, and even if we're not sure what that reason is or that we are equipped for the task or reason, God knows!

It seems hard to believe that on Sunday 13th September I will preach here at St Mary's in the morning and lead some kind of service in the evening, and then a couple of weeks later start at Cranmer.

I'll still be in Richmond, but everything will be very different, for me, for our family and I guess too here at church.

Stepping out of the boat and going to study has been a very big leap of faith and trust in the companionship and support of God. I'm not sure how it will go or feel, but I do know that it is something we can't not do.

But I also know that along with the many prayers which we have been so kindly reassured about, God will be with us every step of the way, even if in the newness of it all we don't always acknowledge his presence.

But ever so quietly, Jesus calls each of us in different ways and at different times, to keep our eyes on him, and he will help us to ride out the storm and walk through the troubles, held, loved and encouraged by Jesus. And to join in in his mission of love out in the world outside our walls.

In all our journeys of life, we know that it is rarely plain sailing, there are always complications and distractions. Life is always moving. And as we journey and walk through life, we never do so alone. We journey (a little bit like the Footsteps poem) with Jesus walking with us and sometimes carrying us when things get really tough.

It's clear that we need to maintain our focus on God and our relationship with him. And to keep developing that relationship day by day. And for each of that, it will work in different ways with a steady pattern of prayer and worship, of service to God and to others. We might find it useful to have a look at a new venture which is being launched by the diocese and encouraged by +Nick – the Rhythm of Life – where we will be encouraged to give special attention to praying, encouraging, sharing, reflecting, resting and loving. We'll be able to find it on the website later today.

Back to the boat...

Interestingly Jesus didn't stop Paul from falling, but rather reached down to get him. There are times when we will fall, or not get it right, when we lose focus, lose confidence in ourselves and perhaps in God. But Jesus never loses his focus on us. His loving presence is always there. He never abandons us.

Nor does Jesus call the disciples away from the storm into the comfort zone. But rather he calls them, and in his calm invitation to come, the waves start to abate, the winds lessen, and Jesus sits with them in the boat...and they worship him.

And so it is with many things in life – we don't know how they will unfold, but as people of prayer and love and trust we can take heart and encouragement from the eternal gracious and loving presence of our God who calls, equips and loves us so that we can then go out and share his love in our communities and beyond.

Let's finish with a prayer –

Loving Lord, we pray that as we journey through life with its ups and down, its joys and sorrows, with the testing of our bravery, courage and strength, with tossing around of the stresses and strains of life we will never lose focus on you, our Lord God who is our strength and redeemer, and that whatever we do and wherever we are and however it goes, you are with us, guiding and leading and strengthening us in the power of your HS.

Amen