

“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

(Matthew 14:22-33)

10:00am Holy Communion— 9th August 2026

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

<prayer>

I've been on retreat this week on the high hills of Dartmoor, and therefore not concentrating too much on sermon writing. In my laziness, I thought I would share with you something that I initially wrote back in August 2014 on the centenary of a key date from the First World War.

I am a person who, for the most part, likes to be kept busy. Yes, rest is welcome, but the hubbub of life also has its advantages. **I don't mind being happily distracted if it means avoiding the things I'd rather not do.** Behind my daily list of tasks there is always a list of less favorable jobs waiting for my spare time. For example, August tends to mean I should start thinking about Christmas plans. At home, I must paint my large shed to protect it from the winter, which is also one of my least favourite annual jobs. **Anything is better than that!**

[‘Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up a mountain by himself to pray.’](#)

When Jesus goes off to the high places, we should not imagine it as a relaxing retreat. **At some point he had to face the demons.** There was nothing else on the mountain to distract him. Maybe Jesus would have enjoyed the time away from the disciples, but at the same time he knew that were having to cope in a boat in a storm. A difficult season was approaching for him, so there praying alone he had to confront his thoughts of the future without anything else to conveniently fill his time.

Evidently, he was having a bad night, because even before dawn he decides, somewhat irrationally, that he has had enough and should instead go off to join the disciples in the middle of a dark storm.

<pause>

When I read this passage, the classic story of Jesus walking upon the water, my thought was to imagine myself going off to war. If this was the last sermon I heard in my own home church, then what sense of hope or reassurance might I be able to take from it? **I've said enough times here from my pulpit that hope is the strongest of all human emotions and it constantly prods away in us looking for what is the better thing to come.** The Christian faith has always been the greatest source of hope available in history.

It was on 12th August of 1914 that Six army divisions, something between 60,000 and 80,000, men would sail from the UK over to France with the British Expeditionary Force. **All of them were wishing to believe the old hope that it would all be over by Christmas.** I dread to think what kind of fears must have dwelt in their hearts, but it must surely have been a mercy that the full horror of what was to emerge over the next four years was not yet fully known to them.

I have an interesting book at home which is a selection of diary entries from soldiers going into the army and travelling onto the continent. I found this excerpt written by one Private Thomas McIndoe:

'I went to the recruiting office in Harlesden, and when I confronted the recruiting officer he said I was too young, although I had said that I was eighteen years of age. I protested, but he said, 'well I think you are too young son so come back in a year's time. When I returned home I never said anything to my parents, but I picked up my bowler hat which my parents had given me, and which was only for Sundays. I donned that thinking it would make me look older. So, I went back and presented myself again to the recruiting officer, and this time I was accepted. I went home and told my mother and she was very upset when I told her I was to report to Mill Hill barracks the following day.'

Thomas would not have been the first young man to react to the sense of adventure and hope that was the chief tool of the recruiting staff. Another diary entry could have been just a few months later when the same soldier wrote: *‘The first shock I had was when we went from Southampton to Le Harve and then up the river to Rouen. We saw a convoy of wounded coming back - thousands of them. It was my first sight of war, and it took away all the glamour of what we were doing.’*

See how that sense of hope then changes to realization, and then to dread. If I were an army chaplain, perhaps given this reading to preach to an assembly of soldiers approaching the frontline, I would want to tell them about the God of love who sent his own son into harm’s way. God the Father knew beforehand that his child would eventually suffer and die.

But here at the lake (probably the Sea of Galilee) stands Jesus again straddling, as he so often does, a no-mans-land between the Earth and the Heaven. **It’s a dangerous place, out there upon the stormy waters, yet there is still an opening into a place of hope.** In the most difficult of times, a place where every soldier must surely be familiar, Jesus is able to say *“It is I Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*

<pause>

Simon Peter is usually portrayed as the most confident of the disciples, the first to recognise Jesus as divine. Remember he was the one amongst the few petrified disciples who tried to make shelters upon the mountain of transfiguration when the voice of God was heard. He was the only disciple who tried to stay with Jesus after his arrest, and he was the one to speak out boldly to crowds on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came. **Now, characteristically, Peter is the disciple who will attempt to walk on water.**

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” Jesus said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water toward Him.

Brave man. But of course, Peter was terrified: ‘*When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out.*’ It would take more than courage to do that – **because hope always bears-up courage.**

Initially, Peter was able to get out of the boat and walk to the Son of God, but as the fear of death overcame him, he begins to sink and cries out to Jesus ‘*Lord, save me!*’ I wonder how many soldiers made a similar cry as they sank into the mud which surrounded them.

At such a dreadful point of time, hovering in a no-mans-land between life and death, and which so many surely experienced, **the hope which transcends such horror *is to be found unfailing in Jesus Christ.* There is only earthly hope to be found in the strength of man alone.** Such temporal hope was invested into the design of ever more terrible weapons. **But hope in Christ is that even in death there shall yet be a victory for every soldier.**

I wonder if Jesus walked around the battlefields of Flanders? He certainly would have found many who were very afraid. And he says to them all “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.”

No man, whether he walked from the battlefield that day, or whether he remains there still unnamed even today, **was never to know a place where Jesus Christ could not tread or where his outstretched arm could not embrace. He will be there in the night. You shall not be alone.**

Amen