

## **Morning Worship – Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August - Trinity 9**

### *Sermon – Paul Day*

1 Kings 19:9-18

Matthew 14:22-33

You would think that Elijah would be on top of the world. He had just had an amazing victory. He had challenged King Ahab about the worship of false gods – the Baals - and had him gather the prophets of the Baals at Mount Carmel. He had challenged these so called prophets to pray to their god to bring fire for a sacrifice – but they had failed. He, though, had prayed to the living God and had received a clear and wonderful answer to prayer. Despite the altar being soaked with water, God consumed the offering with fire.

Surely the tide was turning; it appeared that the people were beginning to recognise that Elijah's God was the one true God. Elijah had the prophets of Baal killed. And because of this God answered prayers to end the three year old drought. Rain began to fall. Surely things were on the move.

And yet, in today's reading here he is, fleeing for his life and complaining to God. Queen Jezebel had heard of what he had done to the prophets and said he was a marked man – she would do all she could to have him killed. Despite his recent 'success' it was clear he was feeling dragged down by all the pressures around him.

And so he complains to God – look, I have done all you asked. I have trusted you when no one else did; I have tried to talk to the people and to the king, but no one listens to me. I am alone and my life is under threat. Why do I bother?

He goes to the holy mountain and has the most amazing experience of the presence of God. Not, as you might think, in the spectacular – the wind or the earthquake or the fire – the very places that people had experienced God's presence in the past - but in the stillness. The still small voice. The gentle whisper. The sound of sheer silence.

And you would think that having met with God is this special way. Having been so clearly in the presence of the almighty. Having heard God himself address him. You would think that Elijah would see the truth and would begin to look to and move into the future with hope.

But his complaint to God is the same. The words in verse 14 are identical to those in verse 10. Despite this encounter with God, nothing had changed in Elijah's heart.

Let's leave him there in his darkness and despair for a moment and leap forward in time to the picture Matthew paints of the dramatic events on the lake.

The picture is of a boat full of experienced sailors – Jesus's disciples - on the lake at night. A storm brews and the boat is battered by the wind and the waves. They may have been fearful and concerned. Such storms could be dangerous and unpredictable. They see what looks like someone walking over the water and their fear increases. A ghost? An apparition? What is it? What does it mean?

And then it becomes apparent that the person apparently walking on the water is Jesus himself and as he approaches and sees their alarm he uses those words which are all too common in scripture – *don't be afraid*.

Peter – ever the impetuous one – sees this as something he wants to do too. Jesus says to him "Come". He steps out of the boat and starts to walk towards Jesus. But as he does so he becomes aware of the wind and the waves and the storm. He begins to sink and cries out to Jesus – who reaches out to him and saves him. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Now I don't believe that Matthew included this strange story in his gospel to encourage people to walk across lakes. Much more likely it is a story for his readers to learn about faith and trust. A story that says that Jesus may well ask us to "come" into the unknown; to take what seems like a path that is far too difficult for us to cope with; to do something we don't feel equipped or ready for.

He may well ask us to step out of the boat, out of what (despite the storm and wind and rain) still feels a safe and comfortable place, and into the future. A future we might not imagine ourselves living or coping with, but one that when we fix our eyes on him we are given the strength to handle.

He may ask us to do this in full knowledge that there will be times when we doubt, when we begin to sink. But in full knowledge too that he will be there ready to reach out his arm to us and sustain us.

So back to Elijah on that mountain and his complaints to God.

And after the encounter with God we see God not saying come, but saying Go. Go and do these things that I have in store for you; go and be sure that I will not leave you on your own. Go and be encouraged that there are 7000 others who trust in me. Go in the knowledge that Elisha who will take over your role will be with you. And implicitly go in the knowledge that I will there be alongside you. That you have a part to play and only you can play it.

Elijah, like Peter, had to take that step into the future. Trusting in God. Trusting that God would be there alongside him – perhaps seen in the presence of others – but alongside him nevertheless. And if we read on through the books of Kings we will see that is exactly what happened.

Both these stories talk to me about trust. Translating the belief that comes from knowing God and encountering God into a trust that takes us forward to live for him in what may be a hostile and challenging world.

It may be that we are being asked to step out of the boat, if you like, and into the future. Perhaps we sense God saying “come” to us.

Maybe it's a new venture or a new role in the church or the community – something you're not sure if you will be able to do. Perhaps it's about taking you faith more seriously and being prepared to live it out in a way you have never done before. He will be with us. Perhaps in the person of others who will walk with us. Do not be afraid.

Maybe its God saying to the us as churches that it's time to step out, to be more visible for him, to move from the *Knowing Christ* in our logo to the *Making him known*. To move from simply believing to trusting. And he will be with us. Do not be afraid.

Maybe he is saying that as things begin to get back to some kind of new normal across the country we need as churches to learn from what we have experienced through this lockdown period; to develop what we have been

doing online and ensure we can continue to reach out to those who can't or don't feel able to come to buildings.

Last Sunday at the short communion service in St James building I spoke of how in the story of the feeding of the 5000 the miracle was about how the little that was offered to Jesus went a long way. The loaves and fishes, although in the context of thousands of hungry people just a meagre offering, were used by Jesus to achieve something beyond imagination.

As individuals and as churches God is calling us to trust him with our small contributions and step out of the boat into an exciting and challenging future. It won't always be easy. There will be times when we feel blown about by the wind, when it seems we are sinking and struggling. But he will be with us – and we can hold on to his words as we learn to trust in him – do not be afraid.