

Here's a question.

When was the last time you walked on water?

And I guess that sounds like a pretty weird question.

Maybe even a trick question.

But, it's a question I want us to hold onto this morning.

Today's gospel reading has Jesus walking on water.

The disciples are in a boat far from land, being battered by waves, with the wind against them and “early in the morning Jesus comes walking toward them on the sea”.

It is a powerful image in a powerful story.

But the thing I want to notice about this story is that it stands in a long line of stories in the Bible that all feature water.

Think about the story of creation

In the beginning all there is is water until God makes dry land appear.

Think about the story of Noah where God tells Noah to build an ark to escape a great flood that will cover the entire earth.

Think about the Red Sea where God pushes back the water so that the people of Israel can escape from slavery in Egypt.

Think about Jonah, thrown overboard in a storm and swallowed by a giant fish.

There are lots of water stories in the Bible.

And all these stories share two things in common.

First, there is all that water.

But it is what that water actually stands for that is important.

It might be hard for us to understand – as a country we live surrounded by sea and here in Howick the sea is a constant presence.

And, for many of us, heading to the beach and being in and on the water is the stuff that summer holidays are made of.

Being in and on the water is a good thing.

But to the people living in Jesus' time all that water is a symbol of uncontrolled, restless chaos.

It is a symbol of danger, fear, and unpredictability.

For people living in Jesus' time, water, despite its "everydayness" also has a scary quality to it.

It is no wonder, then, that in the book of Revelation when John has a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, in that vision there is no more sea.

Because no more sea means no more chaos, no more fear, no more uncertainty.

So in all these water stories there is chaos, fear and danger.

But the second thing to notice is that in the midst of all that watery chaos and uncertainty God is also present and acts to transform chaos, danger and the fear of death into the promise of life, freedom and safety.

In the story of creation, God creates life and order out of the chaos.

In the story of the flood, Noah and his family and two of every living creature are saved from the water by God for a new start, a new life.

When God pushes back the waters of the Red Sea, God opens the way to safety and freedom for the Israelites.

When Jonah is tossed into the stormy sea, God provides a large fish that swallows him up and saves him from drowning.

And the same dynamic is present in today's reading.

In the middle of the storm, there is Jesus walking across the water towards the disciples in their storm-tossed boat, saying,

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

So two things in all these water stories.

Chaos and salvation.

The two go together, in fact.

Because where there is chaos, uncertainty and fear, God is also always there with the promise of new life and freedom, and relief from fear.

So, now I want to take a look at Peter.

Peter has seen Jesus walking on the water and he walks out to meet him.

He steps out in faith.

But then he notices how strong the wind is and how wild the waves are.

And he becomes anxious and frightened and he starts to sink.
He starts to feel himself going under.

And I suspect that we've all had those feelings.

I suspect there have been times when all of us have felt that there is chaos all around and we are uncertain how to proceed.

Maybe your first day at school or university was like that.

Maybe when you get sick or someone you love dies it feels like your world has changed and everything has become frighteningly unstable.

Maybe a new job or retirement feels like that.

Suddenly, everything is different.

And things may no longer feel comfortable or secure.

It might not be all bad but it might all be unknown and uncertain and we don't know the future we are stepping out into.

We don't know whether we can do the things we've set out to do.

We don't know whether we can keep going.

And sometimes it feels like we might be going under.

So now I want to ask again that question we started with:

When was the last time you walked on water?

And you know what I think the answer is?

I think *we do it all the time*.

I think *we walk on water all the time*.

Think about it.

The water that we walk on is all that chaos, that uncertainty, that fear and that danger that we sometimes find ourselves in.

And we walk on that water in the same way Peter did.

We hear our God speaking to us in the voice of Jesus, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" and we step out in faith.

And like Peter we may set out strongly and then we might look down or all around and we feel the fear and uncertainty of the situation and we get the wobbles.

And like Peter, we cry out, "Lord, save me" and then our God comes to us and walks with us.

Peter walked on water.

Peter walked across that chaos, that fear and uncertainty and he did it because Jesus walked with him.

And it is the same for us.

We walk across all the chaos and fear and uncertainty that we may experience in our own lives because God walks with us.

Maybe Peter didn't do it the way Jesus hoped.

Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

But the thing is, Jesus still reached out his hand and walked with Peter.

So it doesn't matter whether we have a little faith or a lot.

God is with us.

God will come to us and God will walk with us in the midst of our doubt and fear and uncertainty.

And there are many ways in which we can experience God's presence in the midst of all that.

It may be that in the early hours of the morning when we are awake and restless with our anxieties and fear, God will speak to us as clearly as Jesus spoke to his disciples, saying,

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

Or it may be that we experience God's presence in a different way.

And here it might be worth noticing that when Jesus came walking toward those disciples across the stormy sea in the early hours of the morning, he didn't come with great fanfare, or with a great burst of light to announce his divinity.

But although they did not immediately recognise him, they heard his voice and responded to it.

We too may not immediately recognise God's presence with us in the midst of our troubles,

but we can still hear and respond to God's voice and God's presence in the comfort and love of family and friends,

in the grace and hospitality we may receive from friend and stranger alike.

And in those moments too God is speaking to us,

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

God is with us. Thanks be to God.