

Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit Service for Sunday 9th August 2020 prepared by Revd Dr Ruth Midcalf

“TAKE COURAGE”

Welcome to worship this morning. In the Church year, today is the 19th Sunday in what is known as ‘Ordinary Time’. As we gather together from our homes today, these times feel very far from ‘Ordinary’ but God is with us, in the ordinary and the extraordinary and God is faithful. Take time now to be still in God’s presence, and to know that there is nothing that can ever separate you from God’s love. Reflect on these words from Psalm 46, v10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

God is faithful and we are reminded of that as we sing our first hymn “Great is thy faithfulness”

Hymn: Great is thy faithfulness (Singing the Faith 51, Hymns and Psalms 66)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKIqmdfHSk>

1
Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail
not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

2
Summer and winter, and springtime and
harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

3
Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O. Chisholm
(1866–1960)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession and the Lord’s Prayer

Almighty and ever living-God we come this morning to worship and to praise you. You are the source of all life, Creator God, and we praise you for the gift of this new day. You are great in your faithfulness, generous in your provision, wondrous in your grace. Awesome God, we praise you.

You created us to be a people for your praise. Yet today, Lord, we are conscious of those times when we have not praised you with our lips and our lives. We think especially of those moments in the last week where we have hurt others, and you, with our words and deeds, or when we have failed to speak out or act. As we bring these times before you we take a moment in silence to ask for your forgiveness.

SILENCE

Lord, in your great love, you did not leave this world in its messiness but sent your only Son Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the World – our Saviour. Through Jesus, we thank you that we can know your forgiveness, that we can know, as we have just sung, “strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow”. We pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will take us and transform us daily more and more into the likeness of Jesus, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

We say together as a congregation worshipping in many locations, but one in Christ Jesus, the prayer which Jesus taught the first disciples – “Our Father...”

Take a look at the image below or close your eyes and picture a lifeboat on a stormy sea. What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you taste?



Since the foundation of what we now know as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) in 1824, lifeboat crews and lifeguards have rescued over 142,700 people. At the 238 operational lifeboat stations across the UK are people who show extraordinary bravery, going to help others in the most difficult of circumstances. The motto of the RNLI is “With courage, nothing is impossible”.

The last words of that motto reminded me of words from Luke’s Gospel as the angel Gabriel speaks to Mary. He has just told her she will have a son and so will her cousin Elizabeth “For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1: 37 (NIV)). God saw the world was in a mess and came in Jesus, who died and rose again, that we might be restored to a right relationship with God our creator and sustainer and might have life, in all its fulness, now and for all eternity.

We sing about that now, as we sing “When I was lost you came and rescued me” or “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds”.

Hymn: When I was lost you came and rescued me (Singing the Faith 367) or How sweet the name of Jesus sounds (Hymns and Psalms 257)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ4xkBNRwXc>

1

When I was lost, you came and rescued me;
reached down into the pit and lifted me.
O Lord, such love,
I was as far from you as I could be.
You know all the things I've ever done,
but Jesus' blood has cancelled every one.
O Lord, such grace
to qualify me as your own.
There is a new song in my mouth,
there is a deep cry in my heart,
a hymn of praise to Almighty God — hallelujah!

2

Now I have come into your family
for the Son of God has died for me.
O Lord, such peace,
I am as loved by you as I could be.
In the full assurance of your love,
now with every confidence we come.
O Lord, such joy
to know that you delight in us.

Refrain

*And now I stand firm on this Rock,
my life is hidden now with Christ in God.
The old has gone and the new has come —
hallelujah!
Your love has lifted me.*

Kate Simmonds and Miles Simmonds

Readings: Romans 10: 5-15

Matthew 14: 22-33

Sermon

The rain fell very gently at first. It was 26th March and the boat of my life had begun to acclimatise to sailing on the wave of lockdown that had been announced three days before. This would certainly mean a different ebb and flow to life but the prevailing conditions were calm. When Mum didn't answer the telephone, then the rain began to fall; when she didn't answer a second, third, and fourth time over a 40 minute period, then the black clouds grew fuller, the wind strengthened and puddles began to form in the boat of life as the rain came down harder and, with the strengthening wind, waves began to break over the hull. When I called the emergency services, the lightning flashed and the waves grew higher and higher. When the telephone call came to say that Mum had died, the storm unleashed all it had, and the boat of my life was suddenly tossed in all directions; part of its main supporting structure was gone and the hull filled with water...I felt all at sea.

The disciples who we have just read about in Matthew's Gospel, found themselves literally all at sea. What a day it had been. We can imagine them discussing it in the boat. Almost everywhere that Jesus went crowds would follow. The disciples had been concerned for Jesus who had been busy healing and speaking with people all day. As evening fell, they suggested to Jesus that it was nearly teatime and it would be a good idea for Jesus to send the crowds away because they must all need something to eat. But that had not worked out the way the disciples had planned at all. Jesus had given them – the disciples - the task of feeding all the people – thousands of them there were. They had put their heads together, and gone round everyone, managing to rustle up between them five loaves and a couple of tiddlers. It had been almost embarrassing to go to Jesus with only that. But, well, there was no other word for it really, it was a miracle. Jesus had taken the loaves and the fish and just kept breaking them up and everyone had eaten. No one had gone away hungry. It had been amazing.

But now, things feel very different. The disciples are out on a boat, without Jesus. He had told them to go so he could dismiss the crowds. The one they rely on is not with them; they are out on the open water, a long way away from the safety of the land. Darkness falls, and as the night lengthens the wind begins to howl and the waves crash against the side of the boat, lurching the disciples from side to side. The sea, a source of life and sustenance was also a place of potential threat and danger; the disciples were weary, wary and alone.

It is into this situation that, sometime between 3am and 6am- “during the fourth watch of the night”, as Matthew records, a figure appears. The wind is blowing, the waves are rising, and this figure is walking not in, but on, the water. Are their minds playing tricks? No, they can all see the figure...so “It must be a ghost” – they say – and their cries disappear in the wind. Then, in the midst of their fear and above the sound of their own cries, the disciples hear a familiar voice. “Take courage” it says. “It is I, don't be afraid”.

We can only imagine their confusion now. They had left Jesus on the land. They know he hasn't reached them by boat, because they've been adrift from land for hours without him. But only God can walk on water and that voice...it is definitely Jesus. What is happening here? Some Biblical scholars say that Peter is testing Jesus inappropriately but I have a certain empathy with a half-asleep, fearful Peter not being certain of what he sees and responding to Jesus' saying “Take courage” with “Lord, if its you, tell me to come to you on the water”. Jesus' voice sounds loud and clear amidst the wind and the waves. “Come” he says...and Peter does...getting out of the boat and then walking on the water.

On 26th March, as the waves of grief and the winds of shock crashed and blew over the boat of my life, I had no doubt about where Mum was and no doubt at all, that I would and will see her again, by God's grace. What I could not conceive of was how I would be able to keep the oars of the boat of life moving without her. At the start of our reading today, Jesus sent the disciples into the boat, not only so he could dismiss the crowds but so that he could be alone to pray. At points in the last four months I have found it difficult to read, to write and even, as some will find difficult to believe – to talk. In Romans 8 v 26 Paul reminded the church at Rome and reminds us today that sometimes “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” and I know sometimes wordless groans were all I had. But by God's grace and carried on the prayers of so many, I paddled my boat through the first hour, the first week, the first month, gradually seeing glimpses of the sunshine through the rain, finding that those moments of calm in the rough sea grew longer and knowing that when the waves threatened to overwhelm, this would pass. The power to move the boat would come from elsewhere but I had a strong sense that I needed to be prepared to pick up the oars and keep rowing and amidst the roar of the waves of grief, the noise of life and the sound of me doubting myself to hear clearly another voice “Take courage. It is I, do not be afraid”.

We have all needed to “Take courage” in this pandemic; there is no one who has not been impacted by it. But there are so many things for which we need to take courage. When you hear those words, I wonder what they mean for you?

What is Jesus calling you to “Take courage” for today?

I wonder if he already has, and it took courage just to get out of bed this morning and face the day with its business or its emptiness?

Perhaps He is calling you to take courage and come before Him in prayer - even, and perhaps most especially, when you cannot find the words?

Perhaps you are being called to take courage and seek to make the first move in reconciling with someone?

Perhaps you are being called to “Take courage” and stand up for a colleague or a friend or a situation where you see injustice at work?

Perhaps you are being called to “Take courage” and share the good news of Jesus Christ with that friend you have always wanted to share it with; as Paul reminds us in our reading from Romans today – “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news”.

“Take courage” says Jesus.

And we are not only called to “Take courage” as individuals for, although our Gospel passage contains a lot about Peter, Jesus's call to “Take courage” was given to all the disciples in the boat.

When do we need to take courage as a group of disciples, as congregations, part of the Body of Christ?

What do we need to “Take courage” and speak out about?

What do we need to “Take courage” and stop doing or start doing?

Can we “Take courage” and set aside our own agendas and plans?

Are we taking courage, listening to and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, our Head?

For it was when Peter started to focus on the waves and the wind and the noise and everything else but Jesus, that he suddenly got that sinking feeling and the same can be true for us. But, even in that situation, Peter

knew who to cry out to. “Lord save me” he cries, and Jesus reaches out – and together they walk on the water back to the boat and join the other disciples. Then the wind dies down.

When the noise of life, regrets about the past, troubles in the present or fear of the future become waves that threaten to overwhelm us, then we too can cry out to the one who lived and died and rose again to save us...in the certainty that Jesus will reach out and guide us on by the power of the Holy Spirit, calling us and empowering us to “Take courage” throughout our lives until we reach the safe harbour of all eternity. AMEN.

‘Thoughtful Spot’

Following on from Andrew’s reflection last week, travel in your mind to your ‘Thoughtful Spot’. What do you need to ask God for courage for today? Come before God in prayer, aloud or in the silence of your heart, just as you are. Conclude this time of reflection by singing the hymn “Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult” reminding you and all who are worshipping using this service today, to listen for God’s voice above all others and the ‘noise’ of the world.

Hymn: Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult (Singing the Faith 250/Hymns and Psalms 141)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyvpULYBKdU>

1
Jesus calls us!
O'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying: 'Christian, follow me.'

2
As of old apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

3
Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

4
In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures:
'Christian, love me more than these.'

5
Jesus calls us!
By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Cecil Frances Alexander
(1818–1895)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving Lord, we thank you that there is no moment of our lives where you are not with us .We thank you that we can come in prayer before you, when we have the words and when we do not. We thank you that we can bring all we have and all we are, the sorrows and the joys, the challenges and rejoicing to you. We thank you for all you have blessed us with and thank you for the assurance that you are with us always. Thank you that through your grace and in your strength we can “Take courage” and know that you go ahead of us, alongside and behind us. AMEN.

As we bring our prayers for others and ourselves, listen to who and what God is placing on your heart and bring these in your prayers.

Gracious God, we bring your world before you. We pray for regions of your world where there is war and conflict, praying for lasting peace. We pray for all those impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, for nations and localities as lockdown restrictions tighten or are lifted. We pray for those who take courage and speak out for

justice across your world. Give us courage we pray to speak out where we are, to challenge where we see inequality is rife, to care for your world for our own and future generations.

Gracious God, we bring your Church before you. Give us courage as part of your Body of Christ, whichever congregation we are part of, to share the Good News of the live-giving, life-transforming impact of knowing Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Gracious God, we bring before you those we know and love who need our prayers this day. (*Either aloud or in the silence of your heart bring before God those known to you*). We pray Lord that those we have named before you will know your strength, hope, joy, peace and presence.

Finally, Lord we bring ourselves before you. May we walk forward in confidence, in the power of the Holy Spirit, listening for your call and following your leading. AMEN.

We sing together our final hymn in which we ask the Lord to ‘Give new hope, new strength and courage’ – Lord your church on earth is seeking.

Hymn Lord your (thy) church on earth is seeking (Singing the Faith 410/Hymns and Psalms 774)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrYUghRqKOU>

1

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place —
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

2

Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within:
light for darkness;
joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.

3

In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Hugh Sherlock
(1905–1998)

The Grace

You may wish to say this aloud to those who you have been united in worship with, though at a physical distance. Hear them saying to this to you also.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. AMEN”