

Lord Save Me

A sermon given on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, 9th August 2026 – by the Curate, the Revd Charlie Shefford, in Beverley Minster.

Matthew 14:22-33

In the ancient world, the sea was viewed as pure chaos. While land could be managed, cultivated, and inhabited, the ocean was untameable, unknowable, and hostile, a realm where there was no safety. Water was the natural image of everything dreadful, terrifying, and destructive. We see this borne out in the Old Testament, both in the Psalms, which are full of imagery of desperation and danger in deep water, '*Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.*' Having control over the chaotic waters belonged to God's divine authority alone. In Genesis, the Spirit of God moved over the chaotic primeval waters, which God triumphed over in the act of creation. Or elsewhere, God crushes the great sea monsters Leviathan and Rahab, personifications of evil and chaos. And in the Exodus, God parts the Red Sea in a cosmic act of recreation, carving a path of salvation through the roaring waves while the Israelites sing of his footsteps passing over the waters.

But now, in this morning's Gospel, we see Jesus doing what has always been reserved for God alone. In the stormy early morning Sea of Galilee, the disciples are being battered by the waves, struggling against the wind, and then suddenly, through the spray and the darkness, they see a distant figure walking towards them on top of the water. Their immediate reaction is not awe but sheer panic. They scream out in terror, believing the figure to be a ghost, some phantom of the abyss. But it is in fact their Master walking towards them, who has full control over the violent seas. He even uses the divine name to identify himself, calling out to his disciples, '*Ego Eimi*'—'*It is I*'—or more literally, 'I am.'

Already in chapter 8 of Matthew's Gospel, there was the calming of the storm when Jesus was with the disciples in the boat, and there they asked each other, '*What kind of man is this that even the winds and sea obey him?*' Now at this even greater manifestation of power, they cry out, '*You are the Son of God!*' What follows is an incredibly evocative scene, unique to Matthew's Gospel, of Peter walking on the water. '*Lord, command me come to you*' says Peter. This is not a request for a miraculous display, as the crowds and Pharisees so often ask for, but a request for proximity, for closeness to his Lord: 'Not command me to walk, but command me to come to you.' Peter's joy isn't in the supernatural ability, but in the drawing close to Christ. And Jesus replies in one word, invested with divine authority: 'Come.' And Peter steps out of the boat, and for a few glorious moments, he walks on the deep. But as is so often the case with Peter, his initial courage gives way and he quickly loses his nerve, sinking into the water.

What's interesting here is that Peter had the courage and the faith to do the greater thing, stepping out of the boat into the sea. But what caused him to lose his nerve, what he was overthrown by, was the much lesser thing - the wind. We are told it was the strong wind that frightened him and started his sinking into the water.

I'm sure I'm not alone in seeing something of myself in Peter here. How often is it in the massive crises of life we often find a surprising resolve and feel able to rely on God in a way we couldn't before? But then a minor frustration, a cold remark, a sudden spike of worry blows against us and we crumble far easier than we thought we would. When Peter is sinking into the dark waters, he cries out, 'Lord, save me!' and Jesus immediately reaches out his hand and catches him.

The 4th century saint John Chrysostom describes this moment as being like a nestling chick and its mother as when the chick falls prematurely from the nest, she swoops down beneath it, bearing the chick on her wings, carrying it back to the safety of the nest.

Jesus did not leave Peter in the deep to teach him a lesson about his foolishness. He swooped down, caught him on the wings of his mercy, and brought him home. But when Jesus reaches out and catches Peter, the storm doesn't stop. The wind continues to howl and the waves continue to crash while Jesus holds Peter by the hand and they walk through the storm. This shows that it wasn't the violent wind itself that sank Peter, but the fear the wind caused him, the wavering of faith within. The wind is harmless as long as our faith is steadfast, trusting in Christ, keeping our eyes fixed on him, knowing that he has the authority to save us.

So how do we cultivate a trust like this?

Deepening our trust in Christ is not about forging or forcing certainty, nor is it about solving every intellectual mystery. Trust grows when we pray with honesty, crying out, 'Lord, save me!' It deepens as we realise even in our moments of pain and weakness, our moments of sinking, that Christ reaches down to save us and be with us. We learn to trust him when we stop staring at the wind, stop worrying about the waves, and fix our eyes instead on the I Am who steps across the waters.

Trust is built in small daily surrenders. It need not be a single heroic leap, but the repeated daily discovery that whenever we are sinking into the deep, the hands of the Son of God who has control over the chaotic waters is already there, outstretched to catch us.

Reading Text

Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' ²⁸ Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' ²⁹ He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'