



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

9th AUGUST 2020

TRINITY 9

READINGS FOR TODAY

1 Kings 19 v 9 - 18
Romans 10 v 5 - 15
Matthew 14 v 22 - 33

PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am
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READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Revelation 11 v 19 to 12 v 6 & 10; Galatians 4 v 4 – 7;
Luke 1 v 46 - 55

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK TO:

JENNIFER THOMPSON (12th); HARRY COUPLAND (14th)

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY: IRIS DAY

COLLECT FOR – TRINITY 9

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

CHURCH SERVICES

We are pleased to say that there are two services of Holy Communion once again, every Sunday. An 8 am Holy Communion in St Peter's Centre, and a 10 am Family Communion in church.

We are unable to have both services in the same building at present, due to issues relating to the cleaning that would be necessary between the services. (The usual second Sunday pattern of Morning Worship at 10 am followed by Parish Communion at 11 – 15 am will NOT be happening at present for the same reasons.)

On Wednesdays there will be a service of Holy Communion at 9 – 30 am in church. Unfortunately, there can be no coffee and chat after this service at present.

Social distancing and Public Health requirements will be met. Please see our website for details.

There is a free national phone line 'Daily Hope' that offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services. Available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044**

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

CARE AND SHARE

Our initiative to help those who may be short on food supplies in the current crisis. Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need.

If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk etc. please leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

JULY 100 CLUB WINNERS

First Prize (£79 – 50) – JOY SAVAGE

Second Prize (£33 – 13) – ANNA HUGHES-EVANS

Third Prize (£19 – 88) – PAULENE WEST

CONGRATULATIONS!

PCC MEETING – the next meeting (online) is on Thursday 17th September at 7 – 30 pm.

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

- 1 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, ♦
slow to anger and of great kindness.
- 2 He will not always accuse us, ♦
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
- 3 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, ♦
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
- 4 For as the heavens are high above the earth, ♦
so great is his mercy upon those who fear him.
- 5 As far as the east is from the west, ♦
so far has he set our sins from us.
- 6 As a father has compassion on his children, ♦
so is the Lord merciful towards those who fear him.
- 7 For he knows of what we are made; ♦
he remembers that we are but dust.
- 8 Our days are but as grass; ♦
we flourish as a flower of the field;
- 9 For as soon as the wind goes over it, it is gone, ♦
and its place shall know it no more.
- 10 But the merciful goodness of the Lord is from of old
and endures for ever on those who fear him, ♦
and his righteousness on children's children;
- 11 On those who keep his covenant ♦
and remember his commandments to do them.

All: Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn is said or sung:

1. Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea;
day by day his voice still calls us
saying, 'Christian, follow me.'
2. As of old Saint Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and work and kindred,
leaving all for Jesus' 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,
Jesus 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 in glad obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Hear also what Saint John says:

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous;
and he is the propitiation for our sins.

Pause to call to mind our sins

(L) Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

All: Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us
from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Trinity 9 (see previous page):

*Read 1 Kings 19 v 9 – 18 followed by Psalm 85 v 8 – 13
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Romans 10 v 5 - 15

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.
Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.
You have the words of eternal life.

All: Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 14 v 22 – 33 Here are some thoughts on
today's readings from the Revd. Carol:*

Have you ever experienced being in place where there is
complete silence? Where the only sound you can hear is
quite literally the sound of silence? I think the only place I
have truly experienced this was in the highlands of
Scotland, when John and I were in the middle of nowhere a
few miles outside of Thurso. Apart from the sound of the
running water of a nearby stream and of skylarks high in
the sky. I can remember straining to see if I could hear
anything else. But there was nothing! The silence was, as
they say, 'deafening'!

This is what it must have been like for Elijah. After all the
noise, chaos and clatter of the stormy place he found
himself in, to suddenly find everything stop still and silent.

It was at this moment he hears God's voice. A voice of reassurance and affirmation of the work that he is to do on behalf of God.

We see a similar situation where the disciples are in the boat off the shores of the sea of Galilee, a strong wind had whipped up, so there would have been the noise of the water pummeling the sides of the boat along with the howling wind, they wouldn't have been able to hold much of a conversation. Being fishermen of course they would be used to storms, and the sea of Galilee was, and is, known for how quickly this can happen. Indeed, I was caught up in one myself during a visit to the Holy Land. When we set out there was a clear blue sky, then in a matter of minutes there was thunder and lightning that danced along the water, heavy rain and a blustery wind – all very exciting and very Biblical!

The difference this time for the disciples, though, was there appeared to be someone walking towards them amongst the waves. It was of course Jesus and with Him came calmness. They could hear Him speak, indeed Peter even has a go at stepping out of the boat to join Jesus – but soon finds he hasn't quite got the knack.

What does this mean for us? Well when all around us appears to me stormy - we are in a pretty big storm with the pandemic at the moment! God is in it with us. He is ever ready to speak to us and hold out His hand to reassure us. It is in such times when the strength of our faith can come into question – just as Peter's did. Although Peter knew Jesus was with him, he still doubted when things got a little choppy. Jesus says to him 'You of little faith, why did you doubt'?

It was the same for Elijah. He had been quite literally running for his life for at least 40 days and nights and had even been at a point where he wanted to die, as we can see in a few verses before the ones we read today.

1 Kings 19 v 4 says: 'But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.". But God wasn't having any of it, He provided food and drink and words of encouragement, eventually bringing Elijah to the cave on Mount Horeb. By this time Elijah knew he would encounter God, but in the malaise of the storm he could not hear Him, so he began to doubt that all he had ever done in the name of the Lord had been right. But then it comes – the calmness – the still, quiet voice of reassurance that God is there, and more importantly that God is with him and He still trusts Elijah to continue working with God's chosen people.

Many of us will have periods when we don't hear God. Maybe you have been, or perhaps, are currently going through a personal storm that clouds your faith in Him.

In 2002, as part of my job at CWR, I had the privilege of attending the Christian Booksellers Conference where I heard the American Evangelist and Author, John Ortberg, speak when his book called: ' If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat.', won several awards. The book is about faith and trust in God and one of Ortberg's quotes is "Failure does not shape you; the way you respond to failure shapes you."

Some people think that they have failed when they struggle with their faith, but this is not the case. If it were, Jesus would have given up on the Disciples very early on and He

certainly wouldn't have been there to take Peter's hand as he did step out of the boat. Although, Jesus questions Peter's faith, and I would say his trust in Him, Jesus still reaches out His hand and encourages through His words, and we know that Peter, just like Elijah, goes on to be examples of living out their faith, listening out for God's guidance and trusting that they are doing the right thing.

Sometimes when we struggle with our faith, have doubts and fears, we need to stop a while and listen out for God's gentle voice, calling us to what next. Sometimes we have to do what Peter did, step out of the boat and trust that God is there to hold our hand, because one thing these readings show us is that in amongst the storm He is Immanuel – God with us. AMEN

Now pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

We now say together:

*All: You have set us free to worship you without fear,
holy and righteous in your sight.*

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, ♦ and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All: You have set us free to worship you without fear, holy and righteous in your sight.

Our prayers, today, are written by Fr Keith:

Loving Father, as we think of St Peter stepping out in faith and then having doubts, we ask for courage and strength to overcome our doubts and so do the things you ask us to do. Be with our sisters and brothers as they face many challenges, guide them by your Holy Spirit, that even when they are tested, their trust and confidence in you may not fail.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Father we pray for those parts of the world facing great difficulties at this time. Those places where the Corona virus is out of control. Those places where war, violence and terrorism threaten peoples' lives. Those places where natural and manmade disasters have caused death and injury – particularly in Lebanon this week. Guide those in authority to make the right decisions for the good of all. Make known your love and peace to those who are in despair.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Father, we give thanks for all those who make sacrifices for others. We pray that they may know your guidance and support. Help us all to think of others not just ourselves, and open our eyes to the needs of those around us, that we may be able to play our part in making your world a better place for all.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Father, we pray for those who are sick and suffering at home or in hospital. May they experience the healing power of your love, and know the peace that only you can give. Be with those who are carers, give them patience and the strength to go on.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

Loving Father, we pray for the souls of the faithful departed, remembering especially our sister Iris Day at this time. May they all find rest and peace with you for ever, rejoicing in the promise of resurrection given through Jesus your Son. Be with those who mourn, may they know the comfort that only you can give.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us

Rejoicing in the fellowship of Mary, Peter and all the saints we commend ourselves and each other to your unflinching love, saying:
Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare,
will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?
Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Let us pray:

(L) Gracious Father,
revive your Church in our day,
and make her holy, strong and faithful,
for your glory's sake
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All: May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

- 1 O God, will you not give us life again, ♦
that your people may rejoice in you?
- 2 Show us your mercy, O Lord, ♦
and grant us your salvation.
- 3 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 4 Mercy and truth are met together, ♦
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;
- 5 Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦
and righteousness look down from heaven.
- 6 Righteousness shall go before him ♦
and direct his steps in the way.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,
At the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the
lathe,
Be there at our labours and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord,
At the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, Your arms to embrace.
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord,
At the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,
At the end of the day.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 47; Tue 50; Wed 59; Thurs 62; Fri
38; Sat 72, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All I saw the holy city
coming down out of heaven from God.

- 1 I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ♦
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed
away and the sea was no more.
- 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down
out of heaven from God, ♦
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, ♦
'Behold, the dwelling of God is among mortals.
- 4 'He will dwell with them and they shall be his
peoples, ♦ and God himself will be with them.
- 5 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes, ♦
and death shall be no more.
- 6 'Neither shall there be mourning,
nor crying, nor pain any more, ♦
for the former things have passed away.'
- 7 And the One who sat upon the throne said, ♦
'Behold, I make all things new.'

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦
be blessing and honour and glory and might, for
ever and ever. Amen.

All I saw the holy city
coming down out of heaven from God.

Readings:

Monday: Ezekiel 37 v 1 - 14; Mark 1 v 1 - 13
Tuesday: Ezekiel 37 v 15 - end; Mark 1 v 14 - 20
Wednesday: Ezekiel 39 v 21 - end; Mark 1 v 21 - 28
Thursday: Ezekiel 43 v 1 - 12; Mark 1 v 29 - end
Friday: Ezekiel 44 v 4 - 16 ; Mark 2 v 1 - 12
Saturday: Proverbs 8 v 22 - 31; John 19 v 23 - 27

Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All You have mercy on those who fear you,
from generation to generation.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered
the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting
up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the
rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to
remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

All You have mercy on those who fear you,
from generation to generation.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

Abide with us, Lord, for it is evening,
and day is drawing to a close.
Abide with us and with your whole Church,
in the evening of the day,
in the evening of life,
in the evening of the world;
abide with us and with all your faithful ones, O Lord,
in time and in eternity. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

SERMON FOR THIS WEEK FROM
BISHOP ANDREW

A Soft Heart and Hard Feet

Back in the summer of the year 2000, we went as a family to the Big Sheep holiday attraction in North Devon – and there we spent most of the morning in an enormous indoor adventure playground, a magnificent structure of swings, ropes and ball-pools, dominated by four of the scariest indoor slides I'd ever seen. Thinking to set my children an example in courage, I walked up to the first slide with my mat, gulped twice, sat on my mat, closed my eyes, prayed quietly and pushed off. I reached the bottom without incident, and celebrated with a large cappuccino with complementary tea-cake.

The second slide started with a sheer drop, then levelled out, and ended up in the chaos of a ball-pool. My children sat with me a moment, then threw themselves off the top. The pressure of seven-year-olds behind me was growing so intense that I felt I had to move too. Once again I closed my eyes, prayed still more fervently, and pushed off. It was hardly me at my most dignified, but it felt good as I fell, slid and bashed into the ball pool at extraordinary speed, earning the unqualified admiration of those lovely children of mine, which was still – at that point - surprisingly easy to come by.

It was as I stood at the top of the third slide that serious doubts set in. Joseph, then six, sat there sweating. Then, taking his courage in his hands, he pushed off, and ended up a shaken, exhilarated heap at the bottom. I, then aged 39, stood there sweating: then, deciding that this was one for the boys not the men, made my way quietly down the stairs with the air of someone who'd put childish ways behind him.

By now, though, Joseph was insatiable. Just one last slide stood between him and glory: one slide, which started even higher and ended even deeper. As I resumed my cappuccino, I saw him there – a tiny figure, legs dangling, perched on the edge. Joe couldn't do it. He got off and started messing about in ball-pools instead. But the thought wouldn't leave him. His older brother and sister couldn't do it. His dad couldn't do it. He was going to do it. He kept on going up there, peering over the edge. And then finally there he was, pushing himself off the top, falling, falling, then levelling off and coming to an end. And now he'd done it once he was going to do it again... and again – twenty-six more times, in fact; until it was time to make our way through the sheep and back home once again.

And so to our readings on this ninth Sunday after Trinity. Because whether we focus on Elijah in our Old Testament reading, receiving fresh direction and encouragement through the still small voice on Mount Horeb; or on St. Paul in our Epistle reading, urging his readers to be bold in proclaiming the message that 'Jesus is Lord!'; or on St. Peter in our Gospel reading, stepping out of the boat at the Lord's invitation, there's a common theme here, and here it is: that faith, in its very best and truest sense, is spelt C-O-U-R-A-G-E.

Faith in these terms is not just going through the Creed and signing our name beside each of its propositions. By saying 'I believe in God', we're hardly exercising faith at all, not least because - as St James graphically reminds us - 'Even the demons do that, and shudder'. No, true faith consists of taking the hand of the Living God and courageously allowing him to lead us wherever He would have us go: 'having soft hearts', as the missionary Jackie Pullinger puts it, 'and hard feet'. And for the prophet Elijah and the apostles Paul and Peter, that was both very rewarding and very costly. Because having soft hearts, which beat with compassion for the world God loves so much; and hard feet, which are willing to go anywhere at the Lord's command, is inevitably more challenging than opting for the obvious alternative – for hard hearts and soft feet.

It's easy of course to think of courage in terms of stories of great heroism and self-sacrifice – the kind of things that happen to other people but not to us. But the reality is that every day of the week, we are making choices, taking decisions, which either stretch our faith muscles or allow them to atrophy.

Courageous employees say 'no' when asked to do something a little dodgy or immoral. Cowardly employees say, 'of course', for that's the way to the top.

Courageous friends challenge each other, when someone's going off the rails. Cowardly friends stick to superficial chitchat for fear of causing offence.

Courageous couples say, 'There's a problem here', and resolve to talk through their marriage with someone who can help; cowardly couples say 'we're fine', before the marriage explodes in a thousand jagged pieces.

Courageous churches ask, 'What is God calling us to next?' Cowardly churches say, 'Why rock the boat?'

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus had just fed the 5000, and the result was an outbreak of wild, dangerous, messianic fervour. Not that you'd know that from Matthew's account except for one strange little word: 'Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him'. He didn't ask them politely – he didn't cheerfully wave them off at the pier: 'Get in that boat!' he said, 'and go NOW!!'

So why the urgency? John's gospel gives us the answer: having fed the 5000, Jesus had a riot on his hands: they intended to come and make him king by force, to start a revolution – and who were the chief revolutionaries? I may be wrong, but I guess their names may have been Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Judas and six or so others. Those serene little pictures of everyone having a nice picnic of loaves and fishes often hide the end of the story, this potential flashpoint. But Jesus was master of the situation, compelling the disciples to go, dismissing the crowd, then disappearing into the hills once again to pour out his heart to his Heavenly Father.

The next part reads something like a classic Hammer horror movie. It's the dead of night, the wind is lashing against the sails, the waves are crashing onto the deck, the mast is creaking – and an eerie presence makes its way from the distance towards the boat walking on the water. 'It's a ghost', they said and cried out in fear: 'AAAH!' But this was no horror movie: 'Take courage', said Jesus, 'It is I. Don't be afraid'.

And here's the key moment for this morning's purposes: 'Lord, if it's you', Peter replied, 'Tell me to come to you on the water'. Would that have been your reaction? It seems a daft response in many ways, and yet strangely impressive. 'Come', said Jesus. *Oh boy, now he'd have to do it or he'd really lose face.* Sitting on the edge of the boat for a while, I guess, closing his eyes as he rested his feet on the stormy waters, he pushed off – and yes he was walking, walking on the water.

And it was only then that the full magnitude of what he was doing hit him – and with it a sudden realisation that the wind was whipping round his ears. Peter knew this lake – he'd fished on it every day – he knew just how treacherous it could be. And now panic was setting in: 'I'm sinking!' he thought – 'Lord, save me!!' he cried. And there was the Lord's hand lifting him up, leading him back into the boat. And we don't know Jesus' expression at the end of our gospel reading, but I think it was probably a playful smile, 'O you of little faith', he said, 'why did you doubt?'

Drawing these threads together, it seems to me there are two kinds of faith, two kinds of courage. There is reactive courage, a courage that hangs on in there whatever life throws our way; and there is proactive courage, a courage that deliberately goes out seeking after fresh challenges.

These past few months have given many of us a sharp lesson in reactive courage-building. We've been faced with some really stormy seas: with personal isolation, perhaps; with sickness ourselves or among our closest friends or family members; with the task of educating our children on top of everything else; with financial pressures and fears of redundancy; with the loss of a loved one made all the crueller because we couldn't be there beside them when they died. And in the face of such storms, our readings today would say to us: choose faith, choose courage.

These past few months have also given many of us a real opportunity in *proactive* courage building. Perhaps we've come off very lightly, perhaps we're aware that the storms have affected others far more than us: but rather than choosing the way of hard hearts and soft feet, we've allowed our hearts to be filled with God's compassion and our feet to lead us into some challenging places: our local foodbank, perhaps, where we've been helping out; our local hospital where we've been acting as a volunteer chaplain; the front path of our neighbour, for whom we've been doing the shopping.

Neither kind of courage is superior to the other: the person who proactively volunteers at the foodbank is not braver than the single parent mum committed to home schooling her children against all the odds. And yet, while we can't dictate the circumstances that will call for reactive courage, we *can* get into training: we can try out a little proactive faith-stretching, courage-building, for ourselves.

No-one told Joseph to jump off that slide. No-one told Peter to get out of the boat. The whole initiative belonged to Peter, not to Jesus. But Joe, Peter, were engaging in a little proactive faith-stretching, courage-building of their own. It's something we shouldn't try to take on as an additional burden if the circumstances around us are already calling for all the courage we can lay our hands on. But if life's a bit tame, a bit too safe: if we've been let off very lightly in these strangest of days; then pray for fresh challenge, actively seek it out: don't just sit there – do something!

For true faith, as our readings remind us, is spelt C-O-U-R-A-G-E. 'Christians are called to have soft hearts and hard feet'.