

## **Seek help from God**

### **St Matt 14: 26-29**

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." <sup>28</sup>Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup>He said, "Come."

Courage – this is the message for today. Courage complements very well the theme we have chosen for today, which is **Seek help from God**. On the one hand, the theme suggests we need courage to seek help from God, on the other hand, it suggests we need courage even as we seek help from God. In the first instance courage is required in order to seek help from God and in the second instance courage is needed even as we seek help from God. It is in the latter sense of courage, while seeking help from God that I would like us to think about the message through the theme for today in this reflection.

In a recent presentation on protecting the environment, a representative of the National Environment and Planning Agency

(NEPA), reminded the audience of the real impact of global warming and the courage it takes to respond appropriately. He indicated, for example, that since hurricane Gilbert in 1988 we have seen an increase in the number of storms and hurricanes annually. Prior to hurricane Gilbert the hurricane with the greatest intensity was in the 1950s. The increased number of storms and hurricanes are directly linked to an increase in sea temperatures. Now that we are in the hurricane season we can expect much activity and this requires courage on our part to prepare and respond appropriately.

In the gospel reading for today from Matthew chapter fourteen the writer uses a storm on the Sea of Galilee to illustrate the turbulent nature of faith and he says our approach requires the virtue of courage in order to remain strong. Prior to introducing the narrative of the storm at sea, Matthew reminds us about the beheading of John the Baptist. Matthew introduces the message of courage using John the Baptist as a model. Courage in the life of faith is by no means a walk in the park; it can cost a person his

life. Nevertheless, the message is this: it requires courage to live as a person of faith.

Following the story of the beheading of John the Baptist Matthew tells us about Jesus feeding five thousand people. Courage comes out in Jesus' statement, "you give them something to eat" (14:16). The proverbial storm at sea is preceded by a storm on land. Five thousand people are to be fed and there is no food for them. Jesus' message, through Matthew, is that this seeming impossible situation can be addressed if the disciples adopt the posture of courage in the face of tremendous odds.

We come now to the incident of the storm at sea. What does this mean in light of the need for courage as a person of faith?

Matthew introduces the incident with the storm as a matter of urgency. He uses the word immediately to indicate the importance of courage in the life of the Christian. Immediately following the feeding of the five thousand people Jesus allows the disciple to cross the Sea of Galilee by boat while he goes up a

mountain to pray. It was while they were crossing the sea, late in the evening when it began to get dark, that their sense of courage in faith was tested. At the heart of the test of faith is the willingness to embrace courage as a means to recognize Jesus when life's going gets tough. Matthew says the disciples did not recognize Jesus. The reason is, it takes courage to recognize Jesus when times are difficult, especially for the person of faith.

Matthew's message is that it takes courage to address the challenges of life. Writing towards the end of the first century, Matthew's essential message to the people of faith in the Church is that they must courageously take on the challenges of their time. Just as John the Baptist took on the political, economic, religious, moral and social challenges of his time and was killed, in the same way Christians are invited to courageously take on the challenges of the first century as a means of witnessing to the power of God at work in the world. Just as Peter bravely stepped on of the boat in the midst of storm at sea in the same way it takes courage to seek God in the midst of life's challenges. John

the Baptist showed by his life and death what this life of courage in faith looks like and Christians are invited to do likewise.

Striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and renewing the life of the earth is one courageous witness Christians are called upon to take on in our time. This call to protect the life of the earth is the fifth mark of mission of the Anglican Communion.

According to the *Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide*,

“The problems facing our natural world are increasingly evident. Global temperatures, sea levels and the list of species facing extinction are all rising – and so too is a realisation that our actions (or inaction) are largely to blame. Yet the Bible tells us that humans have a God-given mandate to care for our world” (<http://www.cccw.cam.ac.uk/pages/encounter/care-for-creation.php>).

This call to care for the world, and the people in it, is Matthew’s message in the story of the feeding of the five thousand people. Yet, the feeding of the people is not an end in itself. It must, like the storm on the Sea of Galilee, point us to the power of God at work in the world. Similarly, striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and renewing the life of the earth must also point us to

God. Pointing to God is especially useful in cases where, like Peter and the other disciples, people of faith are not able to recognize the presence and power of God at work in the world.

In the final analysis therefore it takes courage to recognize God at work in the world. This courage is especially useful in times of challenges and difficulties. Courage is a matter of the heart, a matter of faith, a matter of challenging political, economic, religious and social forces for the good of all people and especially in relation to protecting and preserving the environment. Courage is about safeguarding the integrity of creation and renewing the life of the earth. It takes courage to care for the world and this too is our mission as faithful and courageous witnesses of God.