

## On water

13 8 17

Almighty God,  
who sent your Holy Spirit  
to be the light and life of your Church:  
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,  
that we may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit  
in love and joy and peace.

Our text may be found in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 14 verse 28

‘ . . . bid me come to you . . . ’

I’m on the beach in Dinard. It’s summertime and, on a sunny morning, the sea looks inviting, tempting me in to swim. I meet a French couple on the sand who know I’m the priest here at St Bart’s and the man has a nice sense of humour. With a smile, he simply asks if I can walk on water and without hesitation, I simply reply, “No . . . but I can walk in water.”

We can find the account of Jesus walking on the water in both Matthew and Mark gospel but only Matthew tells us of Peter trying to walk to Jesus on the water then coming unstuck. In Peterborough Cathedral, there’s a sculpture in wood of a young Peter slipping over the side of the boat onto the water as he tries to come to Jesus. In Mark 6 and Matthew 14, we read that Jesus has fed the 5,000. Then, Jesus tells the disciples to go back across the lake by boat while he dismisses the

crowd and has some time alone to pray. Then it's the evening. The disciples' boat is in the middle of the lake going nowhere fast because of the wind. Jesus walks over the water to join them. And they are terrified because, in the gloom, Jesus looks like a ghost. But he calls over to reassure them and, in a moment of inspired madness, Peter asks Jesus if he can step out of the boat and join him. And Jesus invites him to come and he does. At first, all goes well till Peter, distracted by the wind and the waves, panics and starts to sink – only to be saved by Jesus' outstretched hand and they both end up back in the boat. The disciples are well impressed, recognising what's happened as another sign of who Jesus truly is – the Son of God, the Messiah, their Saviour.

Of the disciples in the gospels, Peter perhaps is the one we know best. I'm well impressed with this fisherman, Simon, renamed Peter the rock by Jesus, the apostle Peter who goes on to make such an impression on the Early Church, dying a martyr's death in Rome having taken the good news to the heart of the Roman Empire. I'm so impressed with Peter that over several years I written a series of twelve dramatic monologues which were printed one a month in our church magazine last year and are all available to be read on our church website. This year, they have been translated into French by Pasteur Gilbert Baume and will be read by Dr David Norris in English at a meeting here in November of the Groupement Oecuménique. If you are courageous enough to venture out on a dark, cold November evening, the second Tuesday in November, November 12<sup>th</sup>, it will be well worth it and to encourage you to come, let's end today's sermon by hearing David read 'Peter walking on water'.



## *Walking on Water*

Night on the Lake,  
rowing in a head-wind,  
straining on our oars,  
making little progress.

The day's been hard:  
crowds of people, hungry  
for more than teaching.

A boy's given us  
five loaves, two fish.

Jesus takes them,  
blesses them,  
breaks them,  
gives them to us  
to give to the people.

There's enough for all  
and nearly a riot –

“Jesus for king !”

We go off in the boat;  
he gets rid of the crowd:  
he needs to be alone  
to pray on the hillside.

The wind is howling,  
making rowing pointless.

Then, we see something,  
walking towards us,  
a ghost on the water.

Terrified, we scream !

But Jesus calls to us  
and all is well.

Am I stupid or what ?

I so want to be with him;

I call to him, "If it's you,  
tell me to come to you."

"Come." And I do.

Slipping over the side,  
the waves take my weight;  
and I'm walking on water  
to my teacher, to my friend.  
I'm looking straight at him  
till the wind and the waves  
distract me, break eye-contact.

I lose sight of him  
and immediately,

I began to sink.

"Save me, Lord !"

He reaches out to grab me,  
lifting me up,  
supporting me

back into the boat.  
Good to feel firm wood  
wet underfoot again.  
"You're the Son of God !"  
We all say what we all know,  
but seldom say to him.  
Safe on shore,  
all seems unreal,  
like waking up  
from a bad dream  
except Jesus is real,  
truly God's Son.



*Preached at the Eucharist  
St Bartholomew's, Dinard  
13<sup>th</sup> August, 2017*

G: Sermons 36 : On water

