

## “Yeah, but ...” Matthew 14:22-33

The text for meditation for today is from the Gospel of Matthew 14:22-33, which I read before.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you had a **"yeah, but"** moment recently? You probably had. A few times I had spoken with people from Jehovah's Witnesses who had come to my home and near the start of our conversation I was asked, **"You believe in one true God, don't you?"** Knowing that the questioner did not believe in the three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this was a **"yeah, but..."** moment.

Maybe you had **"yeah, but..."** moments when you were at school, like when the teacher asked, **"Did you complete the homework I gave you yesterday?"** **"Yeah, but . . . a strong wind blew the papers away.** Or when a police officer asks, **"Did you know that you were exceeding the speed limit?"** **"Yeah, but . . . you must have been doing 130 km to catch up to me – I'd say you were speeding too officer."** Or when you are really low with some kind of illness and someone says to you, **"Do you believe that God can miraculously heal you right now if you ask Him?"** Another **"yeah, but"** moment. **"Yeah,** God can miraculously heal people, **but** He does not promise that He will every time we ask Him (take Paul as an example and his 'thorn in the flesh'.")

Another **"yeah, but"** moment. **"Don't you think that you should be using your God-given abilities to serve in the church in some way?"** **"Yeah, but ...** (and I'm sure we can all add endings that we have used at some time)". And of course, there are those occasions when the **"yeah, but ..."** is easily replaced with **"no, because ..."** The Bible says, **'Ask and you will receive'** so does that mean if I take out my wallet, and lay my hands on it, and ask God to bless it that my cup (or my wallet in this case) will overflow as Psalm 23 says?" This is a **"no, because ..."** moment. Many people get the **"yeah buts"** when they hear this story in the Gospel reading today. What are we to make of this account? If we identify with anyone in this story it is usually Peter. Let's set the scene.

The disciples were in a boat out in the middle of a lake when a fierce storm came up. The area is known for its sudden and fierce storms and the little boat was thrown about by the wind and the waves. The language the Gospel writer uses describes the situation well by saying that the little boat was **beaten** (or as one translation states, **tortured**) by the waves. That indicates that the boat and those in it were anything but calm. They were **beaten** or **tortured** with the thought that they were powerless against the ferocity of the storm. In our imaginations we see the chaos and the terror, the hopelessness and powerlessness, as the wild winds pounded the boat and the waves rose high above the disciples and threatened to take them all to a watery grave.

Then, coming across the turbulent water and through the howling wind, the disciples see what they think is a ghost. This only increases their fear. But then, above the howling of the wind they hear a voice: **"Take heart! It is I. Do not be afraid!"** It's Jesus. What a relief. Jesus had left His hillside retreat where He was having a bit of quiet time, and came to the rescue of his friends.

But that isn't the end of the story. Jesus invited Peter to come out on to the water and walk with Him among the white caps. Peter took a bold step. He trusted Jesus and stepped over the side of the boat to walk on the water and go to where Jesus was standing. But as we know, he began to look at the wild water and the towering waves that threatened to engulf him. **He took his eyes off Jesus.** He had never been so scared in his life. Peter had let his trust in Jesus be overwhelmed by the storm, the wind and the danger. Jesus had given him the ability to do the impossible, but immediately Peter lost sight of the fact that Jesus was in charge of the situation. He sank and the waves washed over his head.

It looked as if he was going to drown but he remembers that Jesus is there on the water and calls out in desperation: **"Lord, save me!"** And immediately Jesus comes to the rescue, grabs him by the hand and lifts him to the surface again to walk with Him through the water and the waves. Again what a picture this gives us. Peter walking with Jesus calmly and confidently through the death-dealing, turbulent waves.

What does this account mean for us? Is it this: **when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will be okay.** He will help us when we are in danger of going under. Jesus will still the storms in our lives. There's no need to be afraid of. Peter let fear fill his heart and so sank beneath the waters, but as we keep focused on Jesus, trusting Him, then everything will turn out all right. This is where we come in with our **"yeah, but..."** This all sounds good, but something about it does not ring quite true: **"Yeah Jesus rescued Peter from the storm but where was He when I trusted Him completely to get rid of the cancer that slowly but surely is killing me?" "Yeah Jesus stopped the storm and the disciples could sail on in calmness, but even though I am one of His beloved children for whom He died, why does not He bring a bit of calm into my life?" "Yeah there are so many times in my life when I live in storms of worries and upsets. I drown in pain and worry. I call out to Jesus, "Lord, save me" but there is not any hand to grab hold of my hand and pull me to safety."**

What about all those who have died for their faith, trusting in Jesus their caring shepherd? (I have heard that in the last 100 years more people have died because of their faith in Jesus than in the previous 1900 years). It comes down to this. Either this account promises something that it cannot deliver, or else this miracle was included to communicate something different than a simple – if you trust Jesus and all will smooth sailing.

How do we deal with this severe case of the **"yeah, but..."**? What are we to make of this miracle story? Let's look at it in context. You know more often than not we get the meaning of a gospel story if we look at where the Gospel writer places it in his account of the life of Jesus. The story of Peter's rescue by Jesus is followed very closely by three confessions of faith. One by the disciples when Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat. They worshipped Jesus saying, **"Truly You are the Son of God."** Then Peter states in chapter 16, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** And then in chapter 17 the voice of God says, **"This is My own dear Son, with whom I am pleased—listen to Him!"**

The first interesting thing to note that while these statements are being said about who Jesus is, Jesus starts telling the disciples these things on His way to Jerusalem where He will suffer, be killed and that those who would follow Him must also **"take up their cross"**. You see here are the beginnings of a paradox – Jesus is the Son of the living God in whom people trust but Jesus, the Son of the living God will suffer and die - great trials still lay ahead in the future.

The second thing to note is that in the story about the storm, Peter's almost drowning and his rescue was recorded **primarily** as a testimony about Jesus Christ, not about Simon Peter, his faith or lack of it. (That's not to say we cannot learn something about trust and faith from Peter's experience). Matthew includes this story as a lead up to the 3 confessions of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He wants to tell us that **Jesus is the one who understands what the disciples are thinking and feeling, He knows the predicament they are in, He knows about their fear and graciously walks across the water to meet them where they are – in the middle of a storm. He reassures them and encourages them as He calls out, "Don't be afraid, it's Me, Jesus"**.

Jesus responds to their fear by inviting Peter to come out on to the water. Jesus is shown as the One who has the power to work miracles, who has authority over nature, who is loved and trusted by the disciples, who is merciful when faith falters and who is worshipped as the Son of God. Primarily this miracle is **not** about faith or the

lack of it and whether we sink or swim depending on how much faith we have. It is **not** about surviving the storms because of anything we do. **This is a story about Jesus, the Son of the living God, the great I AM, who does not abandon us, even in the most fearful circumstances.** This is a story about the Son of God who **calms our fears**, gives us the kind of peace that enabled Peter to sleep soundly even though he was in chains, the night before he was to be executed.

This is story about the **love that reaches out to well-intentioned but faltering disciples**, and the **forgiveness that never stops**, and the understanding that assures sinners that the almighty God knows what is happening in their lives and always assures us, **"Don't be afraid, It is I"**. This is a story about **Jesus never giving up on a person whose faith is hot one minute and cold the next**. Jesus knows very well that faith and doubt live side by side in each of us and yet He still loves, He even forgives us for being hot and cold in our faith, and still calls us His own and members of His family.

This is a story about those times when we find that for some reason Jesus seems distant and we cannot come to Him, instead **Jesus comes to us**. When we cannot walk to Jesus, Jesus walks toward us and climbs into our boat full of trouble and tragedy to bring the help that we need. The moment Jesus stepped into the boat, the sea became calm and the wind was stilled and everyone knew they were in the presence of the Almighty God.

This story reminds us that it is not only in some quiet, out of the way place far removed from the storms of life that we meet Jesus. Often it is in the middle of wild and threatening life-situations that **we meet Jesus face to face**. We can expect to meet Jesus, to be brought to faith like Peter and the disciples - in the middle of a storm.

Finally, this story reminds us how everything they knew about Jesus caused the disciples to respond with praise and trust. May we also respond with those in the boat and worship Him saying, **"Truly You are the Son of God."** Amen.

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior". Amen