

RECTOR'S PINT

In August I preached a sermon about the well-known story of Jesus walking on the surface of the water on Galilee (Matthew 14:22-33)

I grew up near Henley-on-Thames. One of Henley's notable residents used to be George Harrison who owned the enormous Friar Park, on the hill above the town. Friar Park had been developed and landscaped by Sir Frank Crisp who bought the estate in 1889. One innovation he introduced was the Lake that contained an optical illusion which made it look as if people could walk on the surface of the water. I once heard someone on the radio relating how George Harrison would entertain unsuspecting guests by the Lake and took great delight in their reaction as someone would approach with refreshments, appearing to walk on the water!

Galilee is notorious for the rapid change of weather as violent winds blow down from the Golan heights to the Northeast. When I visited, forty-four years ago, it was sunny and calm and there were coxless fours on the Lake preparing for the Galilee regatta, I thought I was back in Henley! In the story of Jesus walking on the surface of the Lake, he had sent his disciples ahead of him to go to the other side by boat, obviously the weather worsened as we read that the boat was battered by the waves. It was at that moment that the disciples saw a figure walking on the water, thinking it was a ghost, they were terrified. The story recounts that it was Jesus. Space will not permit me here to go into the nature of such miracles, except to say that my starting point is to begin with Jesus' resurrection. If I believe, which I do, that it is intellectually credible to believe that account, that Jesus was raised from the dead, the other miracles fall into place behind that. Walking on water though is a very strange one!

The core of the story is Jesus' response to the disciples, "take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." In the Bible, the phrase "do not be afraid" is found 365 times, so one for every day of the year! The account then tells of Peter's failed attempt to do the same as Jesus as he leaped out of the boat, walked a few steps, saw the waves, and sank. That is an illustration about who we are and how the fears we have can overwhelm us. Right now, we could be forgiven by being overwhelmed about the way the world is, I don't need to spell out the list of issues we face. Personal and health problems can threaten to overwhelm us as well. "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Speaking for myself, as someone who sometimes struggles to manage anxiety, remembering that there is one "do not be afraid" for each day of the year, perhaps that is something I need to take to heart.

Simon