

The Seven Signs of John's Gospel: Jesus Walks on Water John 6:16-29

Our reading today picks up from where last week's ended after the miraculous sign of Jesus feeding the 5000 men plus women and children. He then rejects the demands of these very same people who wanted to make him their king because in their hearts and minds Jesus to them was simply one who would daily heal them and supply or provide all their practical needs. Jesus would have none of this and instead retreats up a mountainside to once again be alone to pray while his disciples headed back across the lake at dusk, the treacherous Sea of Galilee.

Read John 6:16-29

Can man walk on water? Around the year 1500 Leonardo Di Vinci thought he could if he was to build the elongated water shoes made from animal skin that he designed on paper as recorded in his Codex Atlanticus but he never did make the shoes and test the theory. What we know as water skis would be based on his design but pulled by a speed boat just as bare foot water skiers are. So has anyone walked on water?

On June 30, 2011 the UK newspaper the Daily Mail reported on a story of epic biblical proportions about the then relatively unknown illusionist called Dynamo. This magician, whose real name is Steve Frayne, supposedly 'walked' half way across the River Thames on a stretch beside the Westminster Bridge and just across from the Houses of Parliament in London. He was picked then up by what appeared to be a River Police boat. But the reporters of the Daily Mail Online understood that this was just one more thing that was not as it seemed as the boat crew were all part of the act. Was this illusion where Dynamo appeared to walk on water real? Yes, it did appear to happen but is fully believed to be a very well planned, managed, staged and executed illusion, complete with its own crowd ready to attract others, from the moment he walks down steps from a closed to the public gate, on to a pontoon which he then steps off and into the fast flowing Thames River. In the video footage I've seen he looks very much like he is walking with his arms out to help keep his balance in a straight line on something invisible just under the water, but not half way across the river as reported, just 30 metres or so? He walks on a diagonal to the river bank in an area contained by moored boats and other boats strategically stationed to film the stunt to advertise his upcoming TV show. Two Kayakers even skirt around behind him to promote the illusion that

there's nothing under his feet. But if you've kayaked before you know that you can plough over a brief shallow draught of a few centimetres.

There are reports of the Ports of London Authority issuing consent for work under the water, which you need to operate in such a busy area with a high security risk, on the days around the illusion was performed which was enough time for a Perspex type board to be erected on supports under the water. I am not calling it a miracle, because I am convinced that that this stunt was simply a well-managed illusion, just as the Daily Mail I think would want to lead us to believe.

If the Daily Mail reporters and the media of today had been on the shores of Lake Galilee when Jesus had miraculously feed the 5000 plus people and then much later in the day when he came down from the mountain and by himself walked out on the lake to his disciples who were in a boat in the middle of the lake in a storm struggling to make headway, what would they make of it? Would it be for them a sign to report on that points humanity to Jesus, the one whom God the Father has sent, His Son, our Saviour, the one whom we are to put our faith in and by having such belief in, have LIFE in his name? Would the Press believe it is just an illusion or in fact a miracle that points one and all as a true sign to Jesus Christ as the Son of God our Saviour, whom we believe in by faith, and then receive by the Holy Spirit the gift of eternal life?

Or even closer to Jesus back then and there, what about the disciples, how would they respond to the press on what had turned out to be a very long tiring day for them?

The disciples, Jesus' learner pupils, some of them from a local fishing background had another lesson to learn out on the Sea of Galilee. Class for the day was in no way finished. They had all had a good feed and teaching time, had loaded the leftovers into the boat, so they were all good to set sail and head off, rowing the four miles or so over the lake to Capernaum that could have them arriving even possibly before it was totally dark. Unless that is, one of the lake's notoriously common squalls came up, which is just what happened. Through the mountains at the northwest corner of the lake runs a valley, which just like the Cook Strait that separates the North Island from the South Island, acting as a funnel for the wind to blow down on to the lake which is located 214 metres below sea level. So when there is a large temperature difference, the cool air descends down the valley replacing the warm air over the lake at such a fast rate of knots that it immediately on arrival churns up

the water. It was into such a sudden mighty squall created by a very strong wind that the disciples were rowing north east against with all their might. No matter how hard they rowed, in this wind, against these waves they were blown off course being pushed by the wind into the middle of the lake. Apparently even today in Israel the same wind and wave patterns exist and when such a squall comes up even powerboats are by law not allowed to go out on the lake, such is the ferocity of these squalls.

So here are the disciples all together in the middle of the lake waiting for Jesus having headed off under his very own direction. It's dark and stormy now but they have been in a position like this before, only they had Jesus with them who was asleep in the back of the boat that time. All they had to do was wake him up to rebuke the storm with the wind and waves obeyed him and dying down instantly. This time however, in place of Jesus they had those 12 baskets of leftover bread and fish which should have served as a testimony to God's compassion, care and provision, the one who supplies the needs of the multitudes and can supply and provide for all their needs, even in the middle of a storm. Excess bread and fish though, didn't add up to extra faith as not one of the disciples attempted to command the wind and the waves to cease themselves. So there they are, obediently out there in the boat in the middle of the storm rowing hard while looking, waiting for Jesus to join them.

Can you identify with this as a Christian? Are you in a storm right now? You may be thinking to yourself, "Lord, what did I do to deserve this?" It may be that you have done nothing wrong. It is possible to be completely obedient to the Lord and to still find yourself in the middle of a storm. What are the storms of life which invade our own lives and the lives of those who we know and love?

There are issues related to aging, there is the storms of depression, anxiety or insecurity, acceptance and rejection including divorce, separation, abandonment. Then there is the storms of unjust criticism, emotional trauma and the hatred, anger, resentment and bitterness that can go with it. There is the storm of illness, sudden or prolonged; and of course death, the death of a loved one, a child, a partner; especially one not expected to die. Yes, as human beings and even as followers of Christ there is the storm of physical loss - loss of home, loss of job, loss

of money, loss of security. Whether it be an economic or business storm or that of an accident, or any other such event which may change the course of our life in a single moment of time.

One thing I have discovered that being a Christian, a follower of Jesus, does not exempt us from the trials of life. What about you? Have you experienced some storms in your life? Is there any storm threatening you at the present time? If there is I would say to you, take heart, the disciples of Jesus were not exempt either. They were out there in the middle of the lake in a huge storm doing what Jesus had told them to do with Jesus fully knowing their needs, their dire circumstances.

What do you do when you are in the midst of the storm faithfully and obediently rowing away ploughing through the waves, with the wind in your hair, and the spray pelting your cheeks?

You know that Jesus is aware of what you are going through, but, just as the disciples initially did, look as you might, you just can't... see Him.

But then all of a sudden after nearly 4 miles of rowing they spot someone, Jesus, approaching the boat in the most shockingly frightening fashion... He is walking on the water!

So why did Jesus cross the lake by walking on the water? Is it merely because he wanted to get to the other side? Or is it to teach the disciples something very important. But what is it? I don't think he's trying to teach the disciples how to walk on water. They never learn to walk on water after this and people like Dynamo today claiming to be able to perform such a miracle have problems proving it.

The answer is that Jesus walks on water to prove to the disciples that He can! He can always do the impossible, i.e. water into wine.

Why do they need to know this? Why do we need to know this in our boat of suffering in our very own storm of life today?

Because, Jesus is going to send them out to do the impossible, too.

He is going to commission these very ordinary men to go out and make disciples of all men in every land. Impossible! They are not natural born leaders. They are not even Bible College graduates. But they will accomplish the impossible, in spite of their own individual sufferings.

With God, all things are possible!

Why do you need to know this? Because God has called you to not only believe but to do the impossible. He has called you to be a faithful

witness of Him. He has called you to be Christ to the world. And He has shown you that this is possible because He is with you walking right to you in the midst of whatever the storm is that you are going through.

These disciples saw Jesus doing that which was not possible for mortal man to do. They saw it and it filled them with fear... Are you afraid just like the disciples were? They were deeply troubled at the sight of Jesus walking on the water. There was something going on before them that transcended human reason and human experience. They could see Jesus doing the impossible.... What is their reaction? They were frightened! They were frightened because they realised that there was something happening that was much greater than they could comprehend. They were frightened in a way the storm could never frighten them because the disciples realise that it is Jesus, it is not a ghost but instead the One entering their presence who transcends human understanding- and it frightens them- the very real presence of the Son of God, the Holy Saviour, their deliverer- coming to them in a way they could never have anticipated in the midst of their storm. And because of this the disciple's reaction was to not see Jesus as the answer to their problems but instead as a reason to fear.

Jesus would say to you and me, just as he did the disciples as he approached the boat, "It is I; the same Jesus with whom you have been traveling and eating and sleeping and ministering. You don't have to be afraid of Me just because I'm doing what you consider to be the impossible, coming to you in the midst of the storm in a way that you never expected." "Cease with the fear! Be willingly to let me into your boat." And as they did, as they expressed their willingness to receive Jesus into the boat in the middle of the storm, immediately the boat reached the shore, another miracle in itself whereby the disciples enjoyed an instant safe arrival at their destination. They got there thanks to Jesus in the end, having begun in obedience to cross the lake as he had told them, in spite of the storm and their hard toil of rowing, in spite of their fears and insecurities. They invited Jesus on board and reached the destination of what had been their obedient faith objective.

Right now will you invite Jesus into your boat, into your life which might have any number of storms raging in it at the moment? Or are you too scared or frightened to believe in and give it over to Jesus as the Son of

God our Saviour, the problem that you face or suffer from? An issue that even prevents you from sharing the good news of the gospel today?

I will finish with a story from the life of Mel Tari a native of Timor, an Indonesian Island. In 1965 a Christian revival began there in the town of Soe. God then told Mel and a group of young believers at Soe to make a journey to a village two day's walk away to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who lived there. Mel and his team arrived at the spot across the river from the village on the afternoon of the second day. It was the rainy season so at this time of the year it is stormy with the river running high measuring more than 200 metres across and about 6 metres deep. Now there was no bridge in this area. The people from the village could see them and vice versa. They stopped and prayed wondering if they simply had to wait until whenever the river went down. But as they prayed God's command to go and preach the gospel to this village immediately was impressed upon them. So, with the people on the other side in the village watching them, Mel and team took a step of faith off the bank and down into the fast flowing flooded river, in the storm, and began to cross. As they walked through the water it swept past each of them no higher ever than to their knees.

The villagers who witnessed this event knew how deep the river was in flood. Some there however could not believe, even though they'd just seen it with their own eyes, what they had done was a miracle, so they attempted to enter the river and walk across it to disprove the miracle but were immediately swept away and nearly drowned. It seems that no one was expecting this miracle at the time, the impossible to happen, but Mel and his team, in the midst of a storm with no bridge to cross obediently followed God's direction to go and preach the gospel, even if it included doing the impossible. God did a miracle and allowed them to walk on water to get to that village and when they preached there that Jesus was the Son of God and Saviour, just about everyone living there believed in Jesus and received the gift of life because the miracle of crossing the river served as a sign that pointed to Jesus as such.

Will you today put your faith in God and believe in Jesus as Son and Saviour, receiving the gift of eternal LIFE, the presence of God in your life that will never leave you and will help you accomplish the impossible, even in the most helpless and difficult storms of life? Will You?