

### **Call to worship:**

Jesus said: 'Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.'  
Our God is a powerful God,  
who does things way beyond our understanding.  
But we have no need to fear,  
for we know we are safe in God's presence.  
Let us come to our God now.  
Let us bow down and worship.

### **Praise:** Will your anchor hold in the storms of life

1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,  
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?  
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,  
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?

We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
Stedfast and sure while the billows roll,  
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.

2 It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand,  
For 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand;  
And the cables passed from His heart to mine,  
Can defy the blast, through strength divine.

3 It will firmly hold in the straits of fear,  
When the breakers have told the reef is near;  
Though the tempest rave and the wild winds blow,  
Not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow.

4 It will surely hold in the floods of death,  
When the waters cold chill our latest breath;  
On the rising tide it can never fail,  
While our hopes abide within the veil.

### **All Age Story**

Straight after feeding the crowd with the fish and bread, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake. He sent the crowds home and went up the mountain by himself to pray.

Meanwhile, the boat that the disciples were in was caught in a storm – battered by the waves, far from the shore, with the wind against them. Early the next morning, Jesus came walking towards them on the water. When the disciples saw him they were absolutely terrified!

But immediately Jesus called to them, 'Be brave! It's me. Don't be afraid.'

Peter called out in reply, 'Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come and meet you on the water.'

'Come!' called Jesus. So Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk across the water to Jesus. All was going well until Peter began to notice the strong wind and got frightened.

He started to sink and cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.

'Why didn't you trust me?' he asked Peter.

When they got back into the boat and sat down the wind died down. This made everyone in the boat worship him saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

Peter did something he had never done before. He must have been really scared, but Jesus was with him and encouraged him to take a step in faith. It couldn't have been easy, but he did it! All of us at some or other time have done something for the very first time. It was certainly a scary thing to do, but how amazing we felt afterwards having conquered those fears and done it.

Rachel and Lucy have prepared a craft video for us to watch now, which is possibility you could try and do for the very first time!

**Craft Video** – Lucy and Rachel

**Praise:** Be bold, be strong

**Prayer / Lord's Prayer**

Gracious God, we bring to you this morning  
our fears and our joys, our hopes and our anxieties,  
knowing that you are a God who reaches out to us,  
who welcomes us,  
and who, through Jesus,  
brings us safely aboard the boat of your love.

The worst storms, Jesus, are the ones caused  
by our fear,  
when we grow afraid of losing our power,  
or we grow suspicious of the power of others,  
when we refuse to acknowledge your mysterious authority;

Yet, it's in the storm that we find our capacity to love.  
In releasing our weak claim to power  
and opening to your reign,  
we discover a new way of seeing ourselves -  
as called and useful and beloved -  
and the other, whoever they may be -  
as dignified and precious and beloved.

Here in the storm, Jesus, we need you, and we need each other,  
and the love you give us to share,  
leads us through sacrifice and self-giving  
to peace and calm,  
if only we will loose our hold on fear.

God our strength, we give thanks  
that you walk through the water of our fear  
to bring peace;  
that you walk through the water of our dis-ease  
to bring healing;  
that you walk through the water of our confusion  
to bring clarity;  
that you walk through the water of our divisions  
to bring reconciliation;  
and that through the water of baptism

you make us one with you.

**Amen.**

**Reading:** Matthew 14: 22 – 33 (Julie)

**Sermon:** Testing the water

The gospel of Matthew is the only version that mentions Peter, which is probably why his version of the story is the most popular one. There is something so appealing about Peter: the brash, passionate disciple who is always rushing into things, saying what the others are only thinking, and doing what the others would not dare.

It is hard not to love Peter. Sure, he is one of those enthusiastic types who talk a better game than they play, but still there is something so sincere about him, and so familiar. He is full of faith one minute and full of doubt the next, riding high on his confidence in Jesus one moment and lying in the dirt the next. He is not a fake.

Through all his ups and downs, all his great moments and his awful ones, Peter's heart is on his sleeve. What you see is what you get with him: an impetuous, outspoken man who both loves Jesus and lets him down, who richly deserves Jesus' judgment but who also receives his grace.

At the beginning of today's story, Peter is just one of the crowd. Weary after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus has sent his disciples on ahead of him and has gone by himself into the mountains to pray.

By nightfall, he is still at it, while out on the sea his disciples have their hands full, trying to steer their little boat right into a high wind and higher waves.

They are all, presumably, soaked, their teeth chattering and their hands blistered from their efforts, when Jesus beckons to them. It is around three in the morning, Matthew says. No one can sleep, even if he wants to.

They are all watching the horizon, looking for land, measuring the distance they have come against the distance they still have to go when someone spots a shadowy figure walking toward them across the churning water.

"It's a ghost!" someone cries, but immediately the ghost speaks to them, saying, "Don't panic, it's me." His voice must sound strange to them, or perhaps he was still too far away to see, because Peter does not trust him.

Scared to death, putting into words what the others hardly dare think, Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, let me come to you on the water."

What a strange thing to say. Why not say, "Lord, if it is you, make this storm stop right now"? Peter goes right off piste and says "Lord, if it is you, tell me come to you on the water." Show me that what you can do, I can do, if only you tell me to. Take away my doubt. Make me have faith.

"Come," Jesus says, so Peter swings his legs over the side of the boat and, while all the other disciples watch with their hearts beating in their mouths, he places his feet on the surface of the water—the waves crashing against the side of the boat, the wind whipping his hair into his eyes—he puts his feet flat on top of the water, takes a huge, trembling breath, and stands.

Then he takes a few hesitant steps toward Jesus across the heaving surface, like the first steps he ever took in his life, and he is doing fine until a gust of wind almost blows him over, and he panics, feeling his feet sinking into the black waves below, and he goes down like a stone.

I guess I can remember a similar feeling when I first managed to more or less stand on ski's behind a speed boat reaching speeds of what I firmly believed was 100 miles an hour. The feeling of elation probably only lasted seconds before I fell flat on my face in the churning waters!

"Lord, save me," Peter cries out, and Jesus does, reaching out his hand and catching him, hauling him out of the cold water like a big, frightened fish and dragging him over to where the other disciples can pull him back into the boat. And then the awful words: "Oh man of little faith," Jesus says to Peter, "why did you doubt?"

They are the words none of us ever wants to hear addressed to us, and yet they are the same words many of us ask ourselves every day. Why don't I have more faith? Why can't I trust God? Why am I afraid to let go and let God care for me? Why do I doubt?

I believe I am in God's hands and that they are good hands, but then I lose my job and cannot find another, and as the interviews go on and on and my savings disappear, my faith goes with them and I begin to sink.

I believe that God is present and active in the world, but terrible things keep happening. Here we are in the middle of the violent waters of a world pandemic praying for the reassuring voice of God. We hear some positive news one day, but that is quickly followed by warnings of more restrictions, and the waves creep up our legs, and we begin to sink.

Why do we doubt? Because we are afraid, because the sea is so vast and we are so small, because the storm is so powerful and we are so easily sunk, because life is so beyond our control and we are so helpless in its grip.

Why do we doubt? Because we are afraid, even when we *do* have faith. Like Peter, we have a little, and a little is better than nothing, even though there are times when it does not seem enough to save us.

Can you imagine the story turning out any other way?

What if Peter had not sunk? What if he had jumped out of the boat with perfect confidence, landed splat with both feet flat on the water and glided effortlessly across the waves toward Jesus. What if the other disciples had followed suit, piling out of the boat after him, and all of them, with perfect faith, had romped on the water while the storm raged and the wind beat the sails and lightning split the dark night above their heads?

It would be a different story. It might even be a better story, but it would not be a story about us. The truth about us is more complicated. The truth about us is that we obey and fear, we walk and sink, we believe and doubt. But it is not like we do only one or the other. We do both.

This is exactly why we need Jesus.

When we sink, as Peter does, as we all do, our Lord reaches out and catches us, responding first with grace, and then with judgment—"Why did you doubt?"— but *never* with rejection.

He returns us to the boat, knowing full well that the only reason we are in the boat in the first place is because we believe, or want to believe, and because we mean to follow him through all our doubtful clays.

We return to the boat, where our companions grab us by the scruff of the neck and haul us aboard, where we fall grateful and exhausted onto the slippery deck.

All at once the wind ceases, and the waves are still, and in the awesome silence of that night becoming day, all of us who are in this boat together worship him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

**Praise:** Will you come and follow me  
Will You Come And Follow Me  
If I But Call Your Name?  
Will You Go Where You Don't Know  
And Never Be The Same?  
Will You Let My Love Be Shown,  
Will You Let My Name Be Known,  
Will You Let My Life Be Grown  
In You And You In Me?

Will You Leave Yourself Behind  
If I But Call Your Name?  
Will You Care For Cruel And Kind  
And Never Be The Same?  
Will You Risk The Hostile Stare  
Should Your Life Attract Or Scare?  
Will You Let Me Answer Prayer  
In You And You In Me?

Will You Let The Blinded See  
If I But Call Your Name?  
Will You Set The Prisoners Free  
And Never Be The Same?  
Will You Kiss The Leper Clean,  
And Do Such As This Unseen,  
And Admit To What I Mean  
In You And You In Me?

Will You Love The 'You' You Hide  
If I But Call Your Name?  
Will You Quell The Fear Inside  
And Never Be The Same?  
Will You Use The Faith You've Found  
To Reshape The World Around,  
Through My Sight And Touch And Sound  
In You And You In Me?

Lord, Your Summons Echoes True  
When You But Call My Name.  
Let Me Turn And Follow You  
And Never Be The Same.  
In Your Company I'll Go  
Where Your Love And Footsteps Show.

Thus I'll Move And Live And Grow  
In You And You In Me.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord God, we come before you to pray for all those people  
for whom taking risks is a way of life.

**Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.**

We pray for our emergency services – paramedics, the police,  
the fire service – all who daily face difficult situations  
as they seek to help to protect us and make our world a safer  
and more peaceful place.

**Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.**

We pray for people who work in troubled areas  
– the armed forces in war zones,  
those who bring humanitarian aid  
into areas of natural disaster, and many more.

**Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.**

We pray for people who take risks in your name, Lord Jesus  
– those who take your word where it is most needed  
– and for people who grapple with faith and doubt.

**Lord, reveal yourself to them and keep them safe.**

**Amen.**

### **Benediction**

Lord Jesus, as we end this time of worship,  
Help us to step out in faith,  
Remembering who we walk with  
Knowing that you have authority over all

**Praise:** Take my life

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee,  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee,  
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect, and use

Every power as Thou shalt choose,  
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own;  
It shall be Thy royal throne,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.  
Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee,  
Ever, only, all for Thee.