**9th August sermon**  Matthew 14 v.22-33

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love*. (Words by John Greenleaf Whittier from the well known hymn.)*

We have experienced a year like none other in our lifetimes; a year when a storm came upon us suddenly and unexpectedly. We set sail after our “Come & See” mission weekend, only to encounter adverse winds and strong currents. Some have been overwhelmed, struggling to cope with loneliness or isolation; with disrupted plans; with reports of increased incidents of mental health issues and domestic abuse. And we wonder how to bail out our ship, as we ride out the storm.

Our Gospel reading today follows on from St. Matthew’s account of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus was facing storms of his own – the unwelcome notion that the crowd would make him king by force, in order to challenge the immense power of the occupying Roman army. He sought solace and solitude on a mountain side, in prayerful communion with his Father.

Meanwhile, the disciples, including some experienced fishermen, set sail across the Sea of Galilee. Instead of solace and solitude, they encountered one of the sudden storms, for which the lake was – and remains – notorious. No sooner had a need arisen than Jesus was there to help and save.

In life, as we have found this year, the wind can be contrary. There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves and our circumstances; with our temptations; with our sorrows and with our decisions; with our frustrations at those who flout the lockdown restrictions, placing themselves and others in danger. Yet at such a time, no one need struggle alone, for Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with his hand stretched out to save; with his calm and clear voice bidding us to take heart and have no fear.

It does not really matter how we take this incident. Was Jesus really walking on the water? Had the boat been blown so close to the shore that they found Jesus walking in the shallows? Were the disciples disorientated in the darkness, in fear and panic? This is far more than the story of what Jesus once did in a storm in far off Palestine. It is the sign and the symbol of what he always does for his people. When the wind is contrary and we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storms of life, those who turn to Jesus will find calm – a peace that passes all understanding. This was Peter’s experience. Bold, brash Peter. His typical reaction was “I can do this”. Yet, at his moment of impulsive failure, Peter reached out and clutched hold of Jesus. And Jesus got into the boat and brought calm.

As we ride out the storm, let us stick with the reality that we have all learnt during this crisis - we were not created to be totally self-sufficient. We were made for community. We need the company, friendship, and support of other human beings, the generous beauty and provision of the rest of creation. We need the love, grace, and welcome of God the Father, who loves us; Jesus, the Son, who gave everything, so that we might be part of God’s family; and God the Holy Spirit, God’s very presence with us, who gives us wisdom and strength each day as we discover what a life lived in community and for the community looks like.

So today, we give thanks for our families, friends and communities, and for the way they draw us out of ourselves into love and wholeness. Today we give thanks, as we take our first tentative steps of re-opening our churches for our worshipping community. We give thanks for gifts of creation - the air we breathe, the vistas that inspire us and stimulate our senses, the plants and animals that feed our bodies. We give thanks for God who draws us into a community of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and assures us that, with God, we are never left to face the storms of life alone.

Ian Evans