

**Welcome**

**Prelude**

### **Acknowledgement of First Peoples**

We acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land our First Nations Peoples as the keepers of ancient knowledge whose cultures and customs continue to nurture this land today. We are thankful for the community that we share together now, and we pay our respects to their elders/leaders, both past and present, and those who are rising up to become leaders of tomorrow.

### **Gathering and Centring**

For those of you unable to connect via our website on the internet. I invite you to choose three hymns or songs to play at the designated places in the service.

Set up your own worship space and make yourself comfortable. You might want to create a worship space with a candle or a cross, or a symbol that in some way reflects our Gospel reading for today. Maybe you could place something in your worship space that is valuable or special to you in some way, it could be a bowl of water or a boat, or something that represents turbulence and danger. If you have a candle, I invite you to light your candle at the time set aside during worship to light the worship candle.

Before you begin, take a moment to quiet yourself and to be aware of God's presence. You may want to spend some time in silence, or you might want to take some deep breaths and let go of any anxiety or concerns that you may have, and hand them over to God. For wherever you are, wherever we are, wherever you go, wherever we go, God is near. So, when you are ready enter into this time of worship with confidence and hope, knowing that God is already with you, and with all of us, standing eager to meet us and bless us.

### **The Peace**

I invite you to share a sign of peace with those who may be with you at this time. If you are participating in this time of worship by yourself, then I invite you to name those who are dear and near to you or who are on your mind and say, "Peace be with you".

Peace be with you.

### **Lighting the Worship candle**

May the Christ Candle we light symbolise  
our desire to bring light into a world of darkness  
and hope into a world of despair,  
especially for those who feel  
unheard, rejected, and judged.

**Song**

**Dear Lord and Father of mankind**

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

## Opening Prayer

God of safety and of risk,  
you call us over and over  
to leave what is familiar and comfortable  
and go out to the places  
where the Spirit blows wild and wonderful winds of change,

Give us the courage to journey to the shores of the wide sea\*  
and stand where your breath will pick us up  
and send us flying in new directions,  
and give us the trust of birds  
who float confidently on the invisible air  
knowing that you hold them in your mighty love. **Amen.**

## The readings

### *Introduction*

*Take some time to reflect upon these readings. What words or passages catch your attention? What do you imagine the surroundings looked like where these readings take place? How does that impact the way you hear them or how they speak to you? Perhaps you might want to write your thoughts or feelings down, or draw something that reflects your thoughts and feelings, maybe there is a hymn or song that you are reminded of, if so, sing it or listen to it. Then when you are ready, continue on in this time of worship.*

**Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b**      New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

*The Psalm selection this week is comprised of verses from one of the longer Psalms in the Bible. The Psalm begins by instructing the hearer to be thankful and to give praise to God in response to the works that God has done. However, our reading jumps suddenly into God at work creating famine and destroying all the food. These works seem to be less than wonderful. But through the process of suffering, Joseph, who started out being lowered into a pit, is raised up to the highest authority in the land.*

105:1 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.

105:2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

105:3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

105:4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

105:5 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,

105:6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

105:16 When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread,

105:17 he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

105:18 His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron;  
105:19 until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD kept testing him.  
105:20 The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free.  
105:21 He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions,  
105:22 to instruct his officials at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom.  
105:45b Praise the LORD!

### **Romans 10:5-15** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The startling claim that Paul makes repeatedly through this section of the letter is that the purpose of the law is not to tell people what to do. Instead, its purpose is to refer people to the Christ who was to come and has now arrived.

Moses articulates law-based righteousness -- something Paul claims that he himself had while a zealous Pharisee

Paul's shocking claim is that this law righteousness, which he had, is not, in fact, the means by which God is marking out people as God's own either now or at the final judgment.

Instead, God's people are marked out by their allegiance to the Christ story as God's great act of salvation.

10:5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."  
10:6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)  
10:7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).  
10:8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);  
10:9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
10:10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.  
10:11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."  
10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.  
10:13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."  
10:14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?  
10:15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

### **Matthew 14:22-33** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

In our reading from Matthew's, the story of Jesus walking on the water follows the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Jesus walking on water morphs into a story of Peter

walking on, then sinking into, the same water. It begins as a statement about Jesus' authority; for Jesus' contemporaries had learned from scripture that such mastery over the waters is God's accomplishment. When Peter tells Jesus to call him onto the lake, Apparently Peter takes Jesus at his word and steps out of the boat to walk on the water toward Jesus. He discovers quickly that Jesus' words of assurance did not mean the dangerous wind and waves had subsided. He was frightened for his life once again, for good reason, as he began to sink into the turbulent sea.

14:22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

14:23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

14:24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

14:25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

14:26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

14:27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

14:28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

14:29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

14:30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

14:31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

14:32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

14:33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

**Reflection:**

*by Roger Mauldon South Woden Uniting Church*

**August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 — Pentecost 10**

**“Take heart; do not be afraid” — Matthew 14:22-33**

(together with Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15-21)

*Walking on water.* It's a popular image that conjures up many emotions. Some of them can be found in the lyrics of pop songs: the joy of romantic love causing us to feel that we are on cloud nine — *walking on water*; or, at the other end of the spectrum, the despair of being just human — I'm not a miracle worker, I can't *walk on water*. Of course, there are religious songs, too, asking for enough faith to enable us to *walk on water*.

And it isn't just song lyrics. One of my favourite Peter Sellers movies from the 1980s, *Being There*, is about a lost simple-minded gardener whose mutterings, after he is found, are mistakenly taken by people in high places to be profound insights that inspire serenity. After some quirky situations in which he becomes involved, the film ends with him walking into the distance across the water of a lake.

Now I don't want to undermine the ways in which the story of Jesus walking on water speak in song lyrics or movie plots. Jesus stories speak to each of us differently — as we are, where we are. But we need to go back to the source of this story — what the words actually say, and how they fit into the wider picture of the Jesus drama.

Today's story of Jesus walking on water is Part II of the feeding of the five thousand story that we reflected on last week. In Part I Jesus has miraculously fed a hungry crowd that has followed him and his disciples to a deserted place across the Sea of Galilee. In Part II, after dismissing the crowd, Jesus sends his disciples back across the lake while he retreats up a mountain to pray. A strong wind prevents the disciples from making progress, and in the early morning hours they are terrified to see a ghost walking across the water. The ghost tells them to take heart and not to be afraid. After an impetuous incident involving Peter the wind drops, and by now the disciples are in no doubt that the ghost indeed is Jesus, and they worship him.

These stories must have been of profound significance for early Christians, since the feeding of the five thousand is the only Jesus miracle story reported in all four gospels. And in three of them (Matthew, Mark and John) the account of Jesus walking on water follows straight on. In many respects these accounts are similar, but there are also some intriguing differences. John alone tells why Jesus wants to retreat by himself. The crowd is about to take him by force and make him their king. This must have terrified Jesus. Remember the first temptation when Jesus was driven into the wilderness? "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." In feeding the crowd did Jesus compromise his own ministry?

John's account of what follows has a dreamlike character about it, having as much to do with Jesus stilling his own fears as with him stilling of the fears of the disciples. Unlike the other accounts, the disciples have rowed only a short distance when they see Jesus walking on the water. Although they want Jesus to get into the boat with them, he doesn't, and miraculously the boat seems already to have reached the shore. We aren't told but are left to assume that Jesus has stilled the wind, calmed the waves, and speeded the boat on to its destination.

Mixing metaphors, John's account of Jesus walking on water is a bridge to what we might call Part III of the feeding of the five thousand story. Following the boat's arrival, Jesus meets with the crowd whom he has fed the previous day. He warns them not to be seduced by food that satisfies their stomachs, but rather to yearn for food that will satisfy their souls. John ends with one of the seven *I am* statements of Jesus recorded in his gospel: "I am the bread of life". So for John the story of Jesus walking on water is a link between Jesus satisfying physical hunger and Jesus satisfying spiritual needs.

Although Matthew and Mark don't report this Part III, Mark ends his account of Jesus walking on water leaving us in no doubt that it needs to be understood in the context of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Whereas Matthew ends with the disciples worshipping Jesus, Mark finishes by saying that the disciples were thoroughly confused because they had not understood the real meaning of the feeding of the five thousand. Their hearts had not grasped its significance.

Matthew's account is the only one that reports Peter calling to Jesus, and of Peter leaping out of the boat to walk towards Jesus. Peter seems to recognise that the ghostly figure is Jesus. But he also wants to test him. "If it is you, Lord, command me to come to you walking on the water." Jesus answers "Come". Peter impetuously jumps out of the boat and does start to walk towards Jesus. But looking back to the wind Peter becomes frightened and starts to sink. He cries out for help. Jesus grasps his hand saying "You of little faith; why did you doubt?" They get into the boat, the wind ceases, and all those in the boat worship Jesus.

As Gary has been telling us in recent weeks, Matthew's gospel is the voice of the early church which is facing violence and persecution. So his account of Jesus walking on water, and of Peter's response, would have been speaking to the tensions between fear and assurance, faith and doubt, being felt within this late first century community. Even in the midst of turmoil, says Matthew, they can take heart and have no need to fear. Jesus will come to them and lift them up. Though their faith might be weak, Jesus will see them through.

We might think that the words of Jesus to Peter "You of little faith, why did you doubt" are a rebuke. But we can also think of these words said as Jesus stretches out his hand as being an act of encouragement, something like: "Though your faith is weak and you are full of doubt, place your hand in mine and your faith will grow and overcome your doubt". For faith itself is a gift. In story form Matthew is saying what Paul in more theological language says in his letter to the Ephesians: "By grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not of our own doing; faith itself is a gift of God".

And, of course, that assurance can also be ours. Unlike the first century Christians, we aren't being persecuted for our faith. But the same words of Jesus, "Take heart; do not be afraid", come to us at those times when we battle the storms of modern living — of illness, aging, loss of a loved one, financial stress, loneliness, and many other anxieties. And if we do take heart, step out, and even if we do falter, fear can be overcome by assurance and anxiety can be relieved in peace.

Currently the world is being tossed by the storm of the covid virus and is desperately wanting to hear and be able to believe these same words — "Take heart; do not be afraid". As Christians we can't offer an answer to the pandemic, or to many of the other crises gripping the world. But we can remember that the Jesus who offers us peace in the midst of a storm is the same Jesus who fed five thousand people from the simple offerings of five loaves and two fishes. By offering steadying hands to help calm troubled waters in the lives of those around us, and by helping to meet their practical needs, we too can help bring calm, stability and well-founded hope to an unsettled world.

In the midst of the storm Jesus told his disciples to take heart and not be afraid. Perhaps the true miracle of what happened that night was the transformation of doubt to trust and fear to calm — a miracle we, too, can claim.

### **Points to ponder**

- What does walking on water conjure up in your mind? Why?
- When have you wanted Jesus to get into the metaphorical boat with you?
- In what way are you being asked to offer steadying hands?

### **SONG      I heard the voice of Jesus say**

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

### **Offering and prayer**

Gracious and loving God,  
Set us free

to give without expectation of return,  
to receive without second-guessing the motive.  
Set us free  
to allow your words of life, peace and challenge  
to reorient and rededicate our lives,  
our congregations and our offerings  
Take these gifts that we freely offer  
and the service of our lives that we freely give,  
that they may be used  
to others free and to spread your love  
throughout all of creation. **Amen**

**Prayers for Others**                      *(by Keith Fairbrother South Woden Uniting Church)*

## **Prayer – Poem about Covid19**

### **WE ARE NOT IN THE SAME BOAT**

*(Author unknown – adapted)*

I heard that we are in the same boat.

But it's not like that.

We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Your ship can be shipwrecked and mine might not be. Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine is optimal: a moment of reflection, of re-connection.

For others, this is a desperate crisis.

For others it is facing loneliness.

For some, a peace, rest time, vacation in Queensland.

Yet for others, Torture: How am I going to pay my bills?

Some are concerned about whether they can buy their wine on-line,

Others are concerned about the bread for the weekend.

Some are in their "home office".

Others are on Job Keeper or Job Seeker.

Some have experienced the near death of the virus, some have  
already lost someone from it, some are not sure their loved ones are going to make it,  
and some don't even believe this is a big deal.

Some of us who are well now may end up experiencing it, and some  
believe they are infallible and will be blown away if, or when, this hits someone they  
know.

So, friends, we are not in the same boat.

We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different.

And each one will emerge, in their own way, from this storm.

Some relatively unscathed. Others with scars on the soul.

It is very important to see beyond what is seen at first glance. Not  
just looking. More than looking...Seeing.

See beyond the politics, beyond religion, beyond the nose on our face.  
Do not underestimate the pain of others if we do not feel it.  
We must resist the temptation to judge others.  
We are different ships looking to survive. Let everyone navigate their route with respect,  
empathy and responsibility. Amen

<https://www.secc.sydney/we-are-not-in-the-same-boat-a-poem-about-covid-19/nwonknu> – rohtuA

## **SONG      The Summons**

At this point during the service, I invite you to play one of the songs that you have chosen. Once again listen to the words carefully, let them wash over you, uplift you and minister to you.

## **Blessing**

May God's freely given favour  
Christ's self-giving love  
And the Holy Spirit's constant companionship  
remain with each of you now and into eternity. **Amen.**