

Boats and walking on water!!

In the Bible story Peter and the other disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee late at night. The waves were big because the wind was strong. Just before dawn they saw Jesus walking towards them, on the water and this frightened them. Peter says to Jesus: 'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.' Jesus said: 'Come.' (Matthew 14: 28, 29)

The analogy between our Christian faith and boats is a popular one and there are many different facets to the theme. In this story, the analogy is that the boat is where we are now and the water is the next step we need to take in our spiritual development. Peter demonstrated, to get to where we want or need to be, we have to get out of the boat. So what does this analogy teach us about our own spiritual journey?

In the first instance we have to walk by faith. Peter's steps out of the boat were in blind faith; very simple, very straightforward – he asks Jesus and then gets out of the boat and walks on the water, sinking after a while when he starts to concentrate more on the size of the waves and less on Jesus! But his trust in Jesus was strong. Peter was clearly dissatisfied with being in the boat. He wanted to be with Jesus. Expansion of this analogy encourages us to look carefully at what we have in our boat and if we are dissatisfied, do something about it by getting out of the boat and leaving it behind. Our boat may, for example, be full of past regrets or hurts, full of excuses (can't do or don't know enough), full of anger or fear, apathy, a boat in which we are just comfortable or one full of basic attitude! Do we have the courage of Peter to want to be with Jesus enough, to test our faith and courage enough, to step out and walk on the water and walk towards Jesus?

It is interesting that Peter was the only disciple who wanted to be with Jesus enough to, willingly, step out of the boat during the gale. Could they all have got out of the boat if they had wanted to, badly enough?

Getting out of the boat, whatever it contains, is a big step – a step of faith not sight. Equally it is a big step to turn your back on your boat. And it is easy to tell people that they must take this step if they are to get anywhere on their spiritual journey without offering anything to help and support them. It is important to focus on the positive and encourage anyone who steps out in faith, however small, however hesitant these steps are. Whether we are starting off on our spiritual cruise, still stuck in the harbour, or well out on the high seas, we need to experience that helping hand from Christian friends, journeying with us, that word of encouragement, that passing note of praise or sharing time together. And remember, too, that Jesus is the biggest encourager of all, the biggest help and support. And he works best through us. For some reason Peter took the step alone; we should not have to.

I will revisit the boat analogy again!