

## Sermon for 9.8.

### 2021 Staying on the hill

Readings Matthew 14 v 22- 33; 1 Kings 19 v 9 -18.

Ok so Jesus feeds the 5,000. He sends the disciples away by themselves in the boat and he has the night off. Let's pause at that. The crowd are wild for him. The people love Jesus. He is the answer to all their dreams- healing and food. He breaks up the party and goes to be by himself. He needs to pray. Galilee was not a place where it was easy to get time by yourself. He is determined to do so.

For some of us we are having too much time by ourselves. We are lonely and our regular supports are gone. But are we using it well? Are we caring for ourselves in this? Or indulging ourselves? There are members of the church who are loving this time. There are others for whom it is very difficult and demanding. Jesus needed time away from the crowd to pray.

Jesus needed to look after himself. What does self-care look like to you? How do we do it? Do we recognise it is a priority? Without it we end up like Elijah. Elijah has made a right public spectacle of himself. He has taken on the priests of the fertility god Baal. In a public display he has brought a drought to an end after God sent fire down and there was mass slaughter of the priests of Baal. Elijah runs away because the queen is out to get him. A high moment of this display of God's power in fire followed by a threat that Jezebel is going to slaughter him. He runs away and hides in a cave. Exhausted and worn. God encounters him and Elijah is surprised God is not in the earthquake or the fire but the silence. Shut up rest and stop. For many people that is what they need to

hear at this season. The superhero has left the building. Elijah is reminded by God that there are 7,000 who have not been taken over by worship of Baal. The next thing that happens is that Elisha steps up to become Elijah's disciple. I am sure it is not just that me that tiredness is a place where the negatives is very loud.

Jesus leaves the crowds. Sends the disciples away because he needs to take care of himself. Jesus sends the disciples away because he needs to take in and cannot be giving out all the time. If that is true for Jesus why do so many people think it is not true for them? We are not God and God can do it without us. Who do we think we are? We are encouraged not to take good care of ourselves because true self-care means a perpetual demand to say no to so many options. Equally glittery sparkly things are offered us which masquerade as self-care but actually are more pressure. Stop. Sit down shut up. Rest.

The disciples are in the boat in the storm. Together in the boat Peter could manage. Out in the storm even with Jesus it was too much. People need people. Jesus does not calm the sea until he gets into the boat. They are in the boat together.

'We are all in this boat together' has become one of the irritating clichés of this season. It is not true. When I think of members of the church with issues of money and home schooling their children, and now trying to entertain them while they work. People with no outside space. Please they are not in the same boat as me living in this manse with its 4 bedrooms and massive garden. Work from home!- and people are working on ironing boards in the kitchen while many children have been doing school work from their bedrooms. People worried

about feeding their children alongside those who have a secure pay or pension. Those whose relationships are fragile alongside families relishing time together. Hey those people are having a tough time compared to someone like me. We are in the same storm. We are not in the same boat. Some of us need to remember how fortunate we are and polish up our gratitude practices.

The disciples are in the boat in the storm. Jesus does not take away the storm. He joins them in the boat. Then the storm goes. Jesus allows the disciples to be in that storm. He does not jump into action as the waves begin to rise. He needs to be praying. He is a man who has limits. He needs time by himself with God. Jesus is not though in the world of 'me time'. Or other indulgent mumbo jumbo like that. He needs time alone because he has a mission and a purpose that he needs to fulfil. It is not about keeping his life small and easy. It is about doing what he has set his face to. Fulfilling his calling rather than ending up alone in the back of a cave. Bell Hooks in her book *Sisters of the Yam* states that self-care is a political act of resistance for black women. Self-care may be a political act of resistance for anyone overwhelmed by challenges caused by the superman or superwoman syndrome

The disciples set out to go across the lake then the storm starts. Jesus knows there is a storm happening. He does not put on his cape and sprint to their rescue. He allows the disciples to be in a boat in the storm. It happens. In the storm is not abandoned. He is there and he will be around. That is reassurance indeed. In the middle of the storm may I know that the storm is not a sign that you have abandoned us. Abandoned me.

A final word on the scriptures then on Peter. I have to say when I started I could not see any link between these two readings. My interest went straight to the walking on the water. And particularly to the well-worn path of Peter sort of walking and sinking. And that brothers and sisters is why we need to study the bible not just read it and go for the first easy matter that come to our minds. For someone like me who has been preaching for 45 years the perils are obvious. For all of us though to listen to the fresh word from the scriptures is a challenge. Is it possible that how we view this passage will be changed by our time together?

Peter is brave and tries. Are there things that God is calling each of us to try at this time? And how will we cope if they do not work out? Will we remember Peter for boldly stepping out of the boat or sinking? And for us when something does not work will we celebrate that we tried or fixate on the things that did not succeed.