

31.12.23 am

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Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Gordon MacLeod

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. For those of you that know Duncan McPherson or were expecting Duncan McPherson, I am obviously not Duncan McPherson. Welcome to our service this morning. We do remember Duncan and his family this morning as they've had to go off to Aberdeen and I pray that God would be with them at this time. You'll have seen the intimations going through. Please stay for tea and coffee after the service if you're able. There will be a Gaelic service at 6pm this evening and Mr Angus MacLeod will be leading that service. Youth Fellowship will be back in the new year. Farkar will be taking the New Year's Day service here at 11 o'clock tomorrow. Little Fishers will start back after the new year. Please remember Road to Recovery so on again on Tuesday night and please come along. Wednesday night prayer meeting will be taken by one of our deacons, DJ Morrison and pray for God's blessing on that meeting and again if you're able to come out and encourage DJ please come out and Friday clubs will begin after the new year. The minister is on holiday until the 8th of January. If you've got any pastoral issues please speak to one of the elders and Reverend Ian McCritchie is also available during this time. The minister is still being on holiday. The service is next Sunday both the morning and the evening. He will be taken by Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod retired Stornoway.

And on the table at the door there are some weekly freewill offering envelopes still to be collected and if anyone wants to start using the freewill offering or paying by standing order please speak to Angus Halleck or Mary Cameron. Church cleaning rota and an intimation in relation to the island study conference which will be here in the church on the weekend of the 2nd to the 4th and if you want to come to the lectures there's no pre-booking but there is a residential option which maybe people here won't want to take but there's an email address for using. Just welcome to any visitors and please if you're able stay back for tea and coffee afterwards and we'll get a chance to meet with you. We'll begin our worship this morning singing to God's praise in Psalm 139. Psalm 139 in the Scottish Psalter. O Lord thou hast me searched and known thou knowest my sitting down and rising up yet all my thoughts afar to thee are known. My footsteps and my lying down the compasseth always thou also most entirely art acquainted with all my ways. As we come to the end of a year and as we reflect back we can indeed recognise that God knows our every thought and has been with us and encompasses us in all our ways and we pray that we would each know that as we stand to sing.

O Lord thou hast me searched and known thou knowest my sitting down and rising up yet all my thoughts afar to thee are known.

My footsteps and my lying down thy compasseth always. Thou also most entirely art acquainted with all my ways. For in my time before I speak not any word can be. But all together O Lord it is well known to thee. Behind before thou hast me set.

And laid on me thy hand. Such knowledge is too strange for me. Too high to understand.

[5 : 0 0] From thy spirit with all my life. From thy spirit wither shall I go. Or from thy presence my. Ascend thy heaven. O thou art there. There if in hell I lie.

I take I. The morning waves and dwell. In utmost parts of sea. In there Lord shall thy hand me lead. Thy right and hope shall meet.

Thy right and hope shall I. Thy right and hope shall I be. Thy right and hope shall I be. Let us bow in prayer. Let us pray. Our gracious and our blessed Lord we thank you that we can come into your presence this morning.

And that we can acknowledge that you are indeed the God that you are indeed the God that has searched and known our hearts. And we pray heavenly Father that as we come into your presence this morning that we would indeed be still before you.

That we would be still and know that thou art God. That heavenly Father that you have promised. That you will never leave us. That you will never forsake us.

[6 : 38] And you have taken each one of us to be here this morning. Gathered us heavenly Father from different corners of this community. Some heavenly Father here on holiday.

But heavenly Father you have taken us to this place and to worship you. And we thank you that we can come freely this morning and sing your praise. We can read your word.

Your word that has been given to us to direct us on how we may glorify and enjoy you forever. And we would indeed pray that that would be the desire of each one of us.

To know you. To enjoy you. And to walk in you each and every day of our lives. That heavenly Father that we would indeed recognize that there is nowhere we can go from your spirit.

That we cannot hide from you. And we cannot hide our sin from you. So as we come into your presence this morning. We pray heavenly Father that we would search our hearts.

[7 : 39] And that we would see our need of you. And that we would indeed come and ask forgiveness for all the wrong that we have done. As we come this last day of the year. We look back on a year heavenly Father where so much in our lives has changed.

Not just another year older. But heavenly Father so many different things that have come into our lives and shaped and molded us over this past year. And we pray that as we step on the threshold into a new year.

That as we reflect on what has gone before us. That heavenly Father that each one of us would indeed trust you for the future. Seeing where we have come from what we have been through.

That our lives have been pressed down and molded and shaped. That we would go forward heavenly Father seeking to be used by you. Seeking to recognize what your calling is upon our lives.

And that heavenly Father that we would indeed be willing and able. Recognizing that you will equip us. And that you will use us. And that heavenly Father that each and every opportunity that passes our way.

[8 : 48] That we would use it to share a token of you. We are called to go into all the world and to make disciples. And we pray heavenly Father that that would be uppermost in our minds.

That we would see the need that there is round about us. In our neighborhoods. In our streets. In our places of work. That we may be the only light that shines there for you.

And we pray that our light would shine brightly. And that heavenly Father in our interactions. In our conversations. In our very acts that we undertake.

That people would not see us heavenly Father but they would see you. We pray as we come together this morning. That we would know your blessing. We thank you heavenly Father for the young ones that have gathered here.

For parents that feel the burden to take their children to hear of you. That as they teach them in the home. As they take them to church to see what worship is. As the primary school kids go off to the Sunday school later on.

[9 : 52] That heavenly Father each and every opportunity is used to root and ground them in your work. That again that they may grow in wisdom and in stature. But most of all heavenly Father that they may know.

What it is to call you their Lord and their Saviour. And that they would go out into the world and that you may indeed use them. That heavenly Father again that they would be witnesses for you.

As we come and we reflect on a year again heavenly Father. We thank you for prayers have been answered over this past year. As many have gone through storms of trouble.

With illness and bereavement. We thank you heavenly Father for your ever present hand upon us. And we pray that they continue to know you as a God of refuge.

A God of strength. And a God of comfort. That even through the valley of the shadow of death. That you do indeed guide. And you comfort. So we pray heavenly Father for those at this time that are worried over loved ones that are sick.

[10 : 57] We ask heavenly Father that you would be with them. As they care for them at home. Or if they are looked after in hospital. We pray for our NHS. Our emergency services.

We pray heavenly Father for each one that at this time as many will give up time with family to look after others. Those heavenly Father working in Harris House and in Leverborough Home Arrest.

We commit them to you. We thank you for them. And we pray heavenly Father that they would indeed again know your blessing and your guidance. As they undertake that role of caring.

So be with us as we gather this morning. And in all things heavenly Father we pray that we would point to you. That in our worship.

In the reading of your word. In the study of your word. That we would see Jesus. Who was and is and is to come. And we ask all this as we ask forgiveness of our many sins.

[11 : 55] In Jesus name. Amen. Boys and girls. Would you like to come down to the front? More than welcome. Primary school kids.

Please don't be shy. There we go Emily. Who else is coming down to sit with Emily? Please don't be shy. And there is a Sunday school for those in primary school.

And you're more than welcome to go through. I got this. Otter. It's an otter. Yeah. Do you know what else it is? Does anybody know what it is?

I haven't opened it yet. It's a calendar of 2024. It's a calendar for 2024. How many other people get a calendar? Nobody gets a calendar anymore.

All use electronic devices. Do you use one Ezra? Yeah. I've got one on my watch. And I actually have one for Christmas. Oh wow. You must be a really busy man that you get two.

[12 : 55] No, I actually have three. You get three. I have four. You must be a really, really, really busy man. I have four. So in this calendar, there are lots of pictures. Okay.

Oh. It's always supposed to be in an envelope when it came to me. There's various different pictures. But what do you notice that there isn't on it? There's nothing written here.

Does that mean I'm not going to be doing anything this year? No. No? It just means I haven't opened it in a time to write anything in it. How many of us make plans?

Not really. We just... Just go with the flow. Yeah. Yeah. You won't get counted as a Christmas flag or I'm like so. Oh, well. Well, if you were to look at my electronic diary for today, you know what it says?

What? Sunday school. Yeah. I was supposed to... Sunday. Yeah, it's Sunday. But I was supposed to have been taking Sunday school this morning. So that's what I had been planning for until I got a phone call on Wednesday asking would I step in to take the service for Duncan.

[14:08] So we can make plans and we can have things in our diaries, but they can change. Can you give me any dates that you know of that won't change? Christmas Day. Christmas Day.

Any other days? Christmas Day. Your birthday? It's the same day every year, isn't it? Yeah. What date is it? Christmas Day. Is that your birthday? Oh, wow. I'm really special.

If you've been here... If you were here last year, we could have... Last week, we could have sang happy birthday to you. There's so many birthdays today. Whose birthday is it today? My, um...

Your granny's? Yeah. Wow. Happy birthday, Fiona. Thanks very much for telling us that, Ezra. I'm sure she'll be quite embarrassed now. But there are certain dates that never, ever change.

But we keep a calendar. We keep a calendar in our house because there's so many people back and forth in the house, living in the house, and we try and keep tabs on what's happening. So we know when people are going to be at home, when they're not going to be at home, how much dinner do I have to make or not make?

[15:13] Wait one minute, Ezra, one moment. And then what we have to look at is what we think is going to happen. But who ultimately controls everything?

God. God. That's right, Ezra. God changes. God controls everything. Does God know everything? Yeah. Yeah, he does.

And there's a verse in the Bible. And there's a verse in the Bible and it says, For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

And plans to give you a hope and a future. Now that was a verse, just a minute, Ezra. That was a verse that was written way back in Jeremiah. And God said that he had a plan for each and every one of us.

If we put our trust in him. Now what it says there is that it's plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Now that doesn't mean that you're going to get lots of money. If you do get lots of money, you're very, very fortunate.

[16:19] It doesn't mean that you won't see trouble in your life. But it does say that God is in control of everything. And he has a plan for you. And we're going to be looking later on about a storm that disciples went through.

And how God used that to show them, through Jesus, who he was and why he had come. And what we want for each and every one of you, the elders and the deacons in this church and all the members, is that you know Jesus.

And that you know God and you know the plans that God has for you. And you seek to walk in his will each and every day. We can fill this calendar with many different dates and many different appointments.

But some of them might not happen. People change their mind. Things are cancelled. But God has a plan for each and every one of us. And God has made lots of promises to us. And you know what happens about these promises?

They will come true. They won't change. And God has promised that if you put your trust in him, that he will be with you each and every day of your life. And he tells us not to be afraid.

[17:30] We're going to sing in just a minute. Not a Christmas carol. But we're going to sing about God sending his son. And because God sent his son, we can have a hope and a future.

Because Christ came. Not only died for us, but he rose again. And because he lives, we can face the future. And no matter what happens, if we put our trust in him, he will be with us.

And he will look after us. So as we step forward into a new year and we think about what the future may hold for us, let's pray that God will be uppermost in our lives, that we will ask Jesus to come into our heart, and we will know that he will be with us and take us into the new year.

And that he will hold our future in his hand. And that's the same for each and every one of you. Even though you didn't come down to the frontier with the younger ones, it's the same message for each and every one of you, that God loves you.

And because he lived and died for each and every one of us, we can trust in the future if we trust. We can trust the future to Jesus. Let us pray.

[18 : 41] Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you again for our young ones here. Those sitting on the floor, those sitting in the seats. We pray, Heavenly Father, that as they listen to your word, as they go off to Sunday school this morning and as they learn more of you, we pray, Heavenly Father, that their hearts would indeed be open and receptive to your word.

That they would know what it is to remember their creator in the days of their youth. That before the evil days come, that they can say that they have no pleasure in them. That as we have just celebrated the birth of Jesus, that, Heavenly Father, that we can indeed recognize and that they can understand that Jesus holds our future and that we can face it because we know he is our future and he is our hope.

And may we indeed trust in him each and every day. Amen. We're now going to sing in Mission Praise 52. Mission Praise 52.

God sent his son. They called him Jesus. He came to love, heal and forgive. He lived and died to buy my pardon. An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives. And because there is that empty grave, we can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, our fear is gone. And may we indeed know the truth of knowing that he holds our future. And life is indeed worth the living just because he lives.

[20 : 07] If you're able, please stand and sing. God sent his son. They called him Jesus.

He came to love, heal and forgive. He lived and died to buy my pardon.

An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know, I know he holds the future.

And life is worth living just because he lives. And has been too old. And you, for maybe.

[21 : 13] And feel the pride and joy he gives. But greater still, the calm assurance.

This child can face uncertain days. Because he lives, because he lives. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know, I know he holds the future.

And life is worth living just because he lives. And then one day, I'll cross the river.

I'll fight life's final war with him. And then our death gives way to victory.

[22 : 21] I'll see the lights of glory. And I'll know he lives. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know, I know he holds the future.

And life is worth living just because he lives. Thank you guys.

Please feel free to take the kids through to Sunday school.

And please, as they go off, as we're reminded, before, please pray for our young ones. Whether they're here on holiday, or they're here every week. Please pray for them. That they know, as they grow, that they would know and love God.

[23 : 40] We're going to read a couple of passages. And as we read them, you'll recognize that there are two passages that speak about the same incident.

And we caught two different records. So our first reading is in Matthew 14, at verse 14. Sorry, Matthew 14 at verse 22. And then in the Gospel of Mark.

So we'll read in Matthew 14, first of all. Jesus walks on the water. Immediately he made his disciples get into a boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

After he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, It is a ghost. And they cried out in fear.

[24 : 52] But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. Peter answered him, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

He said, Come. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and began to sink. He cried out, Lord, save me.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, O you of little faith, why did you doubt? And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, Truly, you are the Son of God. And then in Mark chapter 6 and at verse 45. Again, the passage is headed.

Jesus walks on the water. Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

[25 : 59] And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.

And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified.

But immediately he spoke to them and he said, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And he got into the boat with them. And the wind ceased, and they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to this reading of his holy word. We're going to again sing this time in Gaelic. And when we sing in Gaelic, we don't stand for the singing.

And we'll sing in Psalm 37. Psalm 37, verses 3 to 5. I'll read them first of all in English. And then Donald will lead us in the singing.

[27 : 13] See thou thy trust upon the Lord, set thou thy trust upon the Lord, sorry, and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shalt dwell, and verily have food.

Delight thyself in God, he'll give thine heart's desire to thee. Thy way to God commit, him trust, it bring to pass, shall he.

S czy Chz hret o loved the Lord, the Lord has come near, my heart's love.

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We pray, Heavenly Father, for this time that we are together, that we would focus on your word, that we would recognise that it has been given to us to encourage us, to direct us, to correct us, and that, Heavenly Father, where we sit under the preaching of your word, that preacher and hearer alike would indeed, Heavenly Father, apply this word to their own heart, not to the person on their left or to their right, but, Heavenly Father, recognising that your word speaks to each one of us directly.

We pray for those that are unable to be with us this morning. We pray, Heavenly Father, for those that are watching online, that while we are separated by distance, that we would indeed be one in the Spirit.

We remember our own minister and the family at this time away. We pray for your hand of blessing and protection upon. And we pray that as they journey back, Heavenly Father, that they would know your blessing and that they would come back refreshed for the work here.

So we commit all things to you, remembering the young ones next door, with Jane and Joyce as they lead them. We pray, Heavenly Father, that again their hearts would be open and receptive to your word and that they would indeed trust their future to you.

[33 : 04] In Jesus' precious name. Amen. So just as we turn to God's word, we read in Matthew, we read in Mark, and I'm just going to read the exact same account that's given in the Gospel of John, just for completeness.

So in John chapter 6 and at verse 15, Jesus walks on water. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat and they were frightened.

But he said to them, It is I. Do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat and immediately the boat was at land to which they were going.

Amen. I mentioned this morning when I was speaking to the kids that I didn't actually expect to be standing where I am this morning.

[34 : 22] I expected to be in church. I actually at this time expected to be in next door with the young ones taking the Sunday school. But as I went back, or when I got the phone call, the first thing Gillian said, Have you got a sermon for Sunday morning?

And I was looking through my notes and I don't know if any of you can actually remember this, but 365 days ago, I stood in the exact same place.

So not only did I get the chance to open the year, I now got the chance to close the year. And while I was looking through the notes on the sermon that I preached on the first of this year, the text came from Galatians 6, verse 10.

And it's just a wee reminder of how we started the year. Galatians 6, verse 10, and in particular, the words within that verse where it says, As we have opportunity.

And as part of the sermon, I quoted, 2023 lies before each one of us. A new year. Are we going to wait for opportunities to arise or are we going to seize the opportunities that God presents to us?

[35 : 41] In particular, are you going to sow to the spirit or are you sowing to the flesh? Are you going to sow for yourself, for your own glory, for your own benefit, to achieve and acquire as much as you can in this life?

Or are you sowing to the spirit? As we reflect on these words and possibly other sermons that you may have heard over this past year or even years before, my question to each and every one of you is still the same.

If you haven't already asked Jesus into your life, while there is still opportunity, will you call upon him while he is near and will you let him in?

So to this morning, as we come to study God's word, as I said, we've just read three passages, three accounts of the same story given by Matthew, Mark and John.

Luke doesn't record the story of Jesus walking on the water, but each of them do record what happened just before that. They each record the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

[37 : 01] It won't be lost on some of you here that the exact same passages were read a few weeks ago when we had the pleasure and the privilege of having Reverend Ian Morrison preaching with us.

And what I didn't do was sit and take notes. I'm not going to now regurgitate the sermon to you that Ian preached on that day. There may be some parts that we cover that Ian covered that night.

But when he was preaching, one of the things that really struck me in the account that Mark gives is where it says that Jesus went to pass them by.

And I want you to just think about that when you reflect back on the year that you've had. Was Jesus passing you by?

Did you call out to him? Or did you let him pass on by? Has he drew near to you? Did you draw near to him? Or did you turn and go the other way?

[38 : 07] So all three accounts tell us of the story of the disciples being in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. And what I'm going to do in part of this, probably because of my past life, I'm going to look at the three accounts and take them as witness statements and see what's similar and what's unique to each one and try and find out what it teaches us from God's word this morning.

But the main focus will be taken from the passage in Matthew. Each account tells us that the disciples were in a boat.

There's no doubt about that. They were in a boat. They tell us in Matthew and Mark that immediately Jesus made them get into a boat.

John doesn't record the same kind of urgency around that. However, in John's account, just before we come into the story of the disciples getting into the boat, they'd just completed the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

All the leftovers had been gathered and the crowd wanted to make Jesus king. And it says, they are perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king.

[39 : 41] Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. Commentators record that fearing the crowd would sway the disciples and they would get caught up in trying to force him to be king.

Jesus immediately put them off into the boat to protect them from what may have happened. He then dispersed the crowd and he went off to pray.

One commentator states that this is similar to the situation when Jesus was tempted by the devil. When he was offered the whole kingdom.

And what did Jesus do at that time? He spent 40 days in prayer. On this occasion the temptation from the people for Jesus not to fulfil what he had been called and what he came to do.

He went off and he spent several hours in prayer. When we look at the different accounts it hadn't yet been evening but he went off into the mountain to pray.

[40 : 48] But he then spent a considerable amount of time in prayer up until the third and fourth watches of the night. Calendars state that the Romans had split the night into different sections four different sections and the fourth watch of the night would have been between three and six in the morning.

So Jesus spent time in prayer. And what does that teach us? teaches us that Jesus got rid of any distractions that there may have been to allow him to deal with temptation and take time out to pray.

How often when we are tempted do we get rid of all the distractions and do we go off to pray? Do we take the time to rid ourselves of things that may hinder us in our communion with God?

Jesus taught us the importance of finding solitude but also making sure that the opportunity was there for us to focus and for him to focus and be in communion with God without any other distractions.

As I said it was almost evening when they went off into the boat. Each of the gospel accounts in Matthew Mark and John tell us when evening came Jesus was there alone and when evening came the boat was out in the sea when evening came the disciples went down to the sea.

[42 : 25] The disciples some of them were fishermen they'd have been used to reading the wind they'd have been seeing that it was getting night they may well have been aware that a storm was coming but still Jesus put them out onto the boat.

It doesn't say that they questioned what Jesus told them to do they went into the boat and they went but shortly after they were in the sea a storm blew up.

There's different accounts as to where they were going. John states they were going to Capernaum Mark records that they were going to go to Bethsaida. We can look at it and say that John gives an eyewitness account that when the boat set out they were heading for Capernaum however a storm blew up and took them to Bethsaida.

Mark would have had that from his research before he wrote his account of the gospel. So they're on the boat on the lake and a storm has blown up.

As I say they're fishermen they're used to being in the water or on the water battling against wind and rain but we're told that when evening came the boat was on the sea and he was alone in the land there is Jesus.

[44 : 08] We'd been told that he'd gone up into the mountain but from where he was in the mountain he saw that they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them.

Jesus wasn't with them but he could see from where he was that they were struggling. he was struggling.

He doesn't tell us that he had lost sight of the disciples. His eye was upon them and he could see that they were struggling. them. It's a clear reminder to us here that Jesus was indeed the son of God.

We can think of when he was being pushed by the crowd and the woman touched him and he felt that power had gone from him. But here he's separated from the disciples but he can see their need.

he saw their plight on the sea. He may not have been physically present with them and he may not be physically present with each and every one of us today but he knows our needs.

- [45 : 24] He knows the battles that each and every one of us have in our hearts whether it be with sin or whether it be with doubt or whether it be with worry.

As we reflect back on a year even as a congregation we know that there are individuals within the congregation that have been through many troubles and we've been through it with them, praying for them and asking God for help, for restoration of health, for upholding in times of bereavement.

And we can come at the end of the year and we can say thank you to God for the answer to prayer that we have seen quite miraculous in many situations.

God isn't present with us physically but he knows our need and he is only a prayer away for each and every one of us.

So not only did Jesus see them and recognise the need that they had, he went to them, he went to them in the water, walking on the sea.

- [46 : 40] Matthew 14 and 25, and in the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea. Mark 6, 48, and he saw they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea.

He meant to pass by them. They saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, John 6, 19. John says he came near the boat.

Mark says, as the account is given here, he meant to pass by them. Commentators have mixed views on some of this and put it down to translation of the Greek. I'm not a Greek scholar.

But what we do know is that Jesus came to them. Jesus came to them on the water and he came by them and he was near enough to them for them to see him.

They didn't recognize him at first and they cried out in fear. How many of us over this past year or even in past years have gone through troubles?

- [47 : 53] Have heard about Jesus? Maybe have even cried out to Jesus but we haven't recognized and acknowledged him as he came close to us.

The disciples had just spent time with Jesus and witnessed an amazing miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. They'd seen the five loaves and the two fishes been broken and everybody that was there that was eating, eaten until they had satisfied.

And then there was 12 baskets taken back in. They had been close to Jesus. They had witnessed a miracle but yet having gone out onto the sea they forgot everything and trusted in themselves and probably in the moment that they were in they felt weak and only when Jesus drew close to them did they call out to him.

Why didn't they call out to him before? Why did they wait until he was right beside them? God is only a prayer away. Why do we leave it until things are at their worst?

Why do we trust in our own strength and our own weakness before we really cry out to God? Jesus came to them.

- [49 : 26] They didn't recognise him and they cried out. And one thing that all the writers agree on is what Jesus said.

He said it is I do not be afraid. And again many of the commentators link this saying back to when God said to Moses I am.

It is I. Do not be afraid. How many of you are afraid this morning? How many of you are going through troubles?

On the face of it everything looks great. You get up in the morning you put on a smile for those round about you. But within your own heart there is a storm.

the disciples cried out and Jesus said it is I do not be afraid. Do you need to cry out to Jesus this morning?

[50 : 33] You may have been walking close with him all the days of your life. It may be the first time that you've heard the gospel opened up to you.

But are you facing trouble? Jesus says take heart it is I do not be afraid. Then we have a unique account in Matthew.

Matthew is the only one that records that Peter then got out of the boat. Jesus has spoken and he said do not be afraid.

How many of us have heard and seen Jesus work? Jesus' answer of prayers but yet we still doubt.

How many of us can be like Peter here where Peter then cries out if it is you Lord tell me to come to you on the water.

[51 : 40] Gideon in the Old Testament put out a fleece. to test God to see what God was going to do. Was it really God that was speaking to him?

Peter says if it is you then tell me to come to you on the water. And what does Jesus do? One word come.

Do you need to come to Jesus today? Are you crying out for him? Do you recognise him? Or do you still doubt? Because even in the doubt that Peter had Jesus said to him come.

And then we have the account of Peter getting out of the boat. And as he fixed his eyes on Jesus Peter walked on the water towards Jesus.

Jesus. But then what happened? Doubt set in. Took the eye off Jesus and didn't focus on Jesus but looked at the storm.

[52 : 50] And what happened? He started to sink. What does Peter say? Lord, save me. Jesus reaches out with his hand and takes a hold of him and pulls him to him and then says to him, O you of little faith.

He didn't say, O you of little faith, and then reach Peter, by which time he would have been floundering in the water. as Peter started to sink, Jesus reached out and took him and then chided him for his faith.

What is our faith like this morning? Are we fixing our eyes on Jesus? Are we looking full in his wonderful face? Or are we focused on what's going on around about us?

And we don't have to look too far. In our own lives, we recognise trouble. We recognise storms on our television screens.

We see wars, we see earthquakes, we see storms. Do we bring them before God in prayer? We sang because I know he holds the future.

[54 : 15] Do we truly know that God holds the future? Or are we filled with worry and filled with doubt? listening to what people are telling us about how the world may end?

Or do we really trust and put our trust in Jesus? Jesus reached out and he saved Peter.

But then what happened? He got into the boat. he didn't just leave them floundering by themselves. He got into the boat with them.

And then as we read on in each and every account, the waters were calmed. Are you prepared to take Jesus into the boat with you?

Are you prepared glad to be like the disciples in John's account where it says, then they were glad to take him into the boat?

[55 : 27] Are you glad and would you rejoice to take Jesus into the boat with you? To calm the storms that you're going through?

Or do you want him to come and calm the storm and stay out of your life? Not to come close. The disciples were glad to take Jesus into the boat.

Immediately the seas were calm. And they came to land. Now we know from there on in it wasn't plain sailing.

If you pardon the pun for the disciples. They faced further trials. But as their faith grew and their trust in Jesus grew, they were able to deal with the troubles that they faced because they took him into the boat.

God said, are you prepared not just to take Jesus into the boat with you, but to take him into your heart and accept him as your Lord and as your Saviour?

[56 : 39] As we spoke with the kids, we spoke about the verse where it says, for I know the plans I have for you. God knows the plans that he has for each and every one of us.

We come to the end of 2023, stepping on the threshold into 2024. Many of us have got plans, many of us have got hopes and many of us have aspirations.

But we need to commit each and every one of them to God in prayer. Our young ones, pray for them. There are challenges ahead for each and every one of them, in school, in the workplace, because not everybody believes the scriptures that we've been given.

As we reflected at the beginning of the year, legislation is changing and changing and changing and what was once right is now wrong.

What was once wrong is now right in the eyes of the world. There are storms ahead. But if we see these storms, let's put our trust in the one who walked on the water and said, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

[58 : 05] Let's not wait until the storm is round about us. In the calm waters, let's find our trust in him. Let our faith grow in him.

We pray for our young ones that they would be rooted and grounded in God's word. We think of a tree that is growing roots deep, so when the wind comes and blows it hither and thither, that it is able to stand tall.

May we know what it is before the storm comes, to have our roots deep in Jesus, to come to him, to trust in him, and take him into the boat, that we may indeed know what it is to have calm waters.

Yes, there will be time of trouble, but if we put our trust in the one who walked on the water, we can indeed recognise that he will indeed save us, and he has promised never to leave us, never to forsake us.

Do not be afraid. Trust in Jesus. Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, as we come before you and as we think of your word, what it teaches us, how it challenges us, how it encourages us to know you better.

[59 : 39] Heavenly Father, that we would indeed recognise that if we do not know you as Lord and as Saviour, that we would indeed search our hearts, that we would cry out to you, Lord, save me, and know that you will indeed reach out and that you will lift us up, that you will set our feet upon the solid rock, and we pray that you would indeed put a new song in our hearts, that would indeed magnify our Lord, and that Heavenly Father, that we would be witnesses for you, that as we leave this place, that we would not leave it and go into a new year without you walking beside us, as our Lord and as our Saviour.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. conclude our service singing in the book, well it's not in the book, sorry, Ancient of Days, City Light Version, Ancient of Days, the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one king reigning over all, so I will not fear, for this truth remains, that my God is the Ancient of Days.

And I pray that as you sing these words, that they would indeed be true to each and every one of you, that you would know that God is the Ancient of Days, and that you would trust and not fear.

Can we? Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one king reigning over all, so I will not fear, fear, for this truth remains, that my God is the Ancient of Days.

None above Him, and before Him, all time in His hands, for His glory shall remain and ever stand.

[61 : 54] All the power, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul, He is here with me, I am not alone, all the love is sure, and He knows my name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

Not above Him, and before Him, all the time in His hands, for His throne, it shall remain and ever stand.

all the power, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

Though I may not see what the future brings, I will watch and wait for the Savior King, then my joy complete, standing face to face, in the presence of the Ancient of Days.

[63 : 34] None above Him, none before Him, all of time in His hands, for His throne, it shall remain and ever stand.

All the power, all the glory, I will trust in His name, for my God is the Ancient of Days.

For my God is the Ancient of Days. To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you before His glorious presence without fault, and with great joy to the only God our Savior, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages now, and for evermore.

Amen.