

Holy Communion 10.8.14

Matthew 14:22-33

WALKING ON WATER

Ellen MacArthur is Britain's most successful woman sailor. As a child she saved her school dinner money for her first boat which was an 8 foot dinghy. She progressed on to bigger things but it didn't stop her from facing dangers.

In one race she said in her diary:

Last night was the toughest I've spent on board. The wind went from 15 to 45 knots in 30 seconds. The seas were just horrific, I couldn't stop her leaping over each wave and crashing down on to the next. At one point, the carbon shelving on which the stores are stacked collapsed.

In 2004-5 she beat the previous world record for sailing round the world in a time of 71 days, 14 hours, 18 minutes and 33 seconds.

The boat was her world. In the Daily Telegraph and interviewer wrote that for the Vendee Globe expedition in 2001: *(it was her) – home, work station and survival-capsule for 94 days. She talked about the meticulous planning that had gone into provisioning her nutshell of a boat; how she worked out, to the last perforation, exactly how many kitchen rolls she would need.*

But Ellen has moved on to something else. She now heads up a foundation to try to help preserve our resources on the planet.

The boat was her world and she looked after it because her life depended on it. Now, she sees the world as a boat: a small, beautiful, damageable entity whose supplies are running out. "I wasn't looking for this," she pleads. "I didn't want to leave sailing. I just couldn't imagine it. I never thought it would stop for a second. (Daily Telegraph)

Ellen MacArthur has known the exhilaration of sailing and the fear and danger of it, sticking out conditions most of us would never even

imagine. Yet there's something about fierce landscapes, be it sea or mountain or desert or ice that draws people. Her life was wrapped up in that shell and depended on her own skill and resilience. Now she's shifted her vision onto something bigger, much bigger and, as she feels, more valuable, even though she didn't think the sailing would ever end.

In another boat, there were some disciples of Jesus. They had been around boats all their lives, like Ellen. They knew what they were doing. Jesus sees them being buffeted by the waves, progress very hard work. It's time for a lesson. This limited view of life needs expanding. They've come with him up to now but they need their horizons to extend again. They don't really trust him for what could be different and bigger and better.

So he comes to them – on the water (why not?!) at a point where it's hard work. They can't go back-it's too far; they're struggling to go forwards. They're clinging to their boat. There is one other option. They could get out and walk on the water. Why would you do that? You can imagine the reactions: *"Rescue me or leave me alone, if you've nothing better to say! I know this boat is old and a bit worn out; it's got the odd leak and it doesn't feel quite so comfortable as it used to but it's what I know so I'm sticking here."*

But Peter has had just one small glimmer of possibility of something bigger. Maybe the way to be saved is to let go. Occasionally, people realise the boat is going to go down and they need to jump before they go down with it.

So just in case he's got it wrong, Peter checks out with Jesus: *"If it's you, Lord, tell me to come"* He's not going to do this mad thing for anyone else or if it's just his own ridiculous idea. And he goes. Small step after small step he goes. He is out of that little boat and into the unknown and he's walking on water! He's doing something amazing and it's saving his

life! Even when he sees the wind and begins to panic, Jesus doesn't let him fall and as they get back in the boat, all is calm. Peter didn't entirely walk away from boats but I bet he had a whole new approach to them after that night.

What is your boat? What is it that seems to keep you safe because you know it so completely, yet which has perhaps begun to feel constricting? What was your world which now feels limiting and unsafe? For some people the boat is their work that gave them influence and a sense of purpose; for some it will have been some relationship or family; for some it will have been a talent. All those things can be good and God-given but if they begin to limit and restrict and stop our view of what else God can give, then it may be time to ask Jesus “*If it's you, tell me to come to you on the water*” It could be time to ask for courage to leave the boat that has been so familiar and see that there's more.

For others it may be more a case of knowing they have just played safe and seen things they felt were wrong in the world but never dared to try to speak out about them. Yet like Ellen MacArthur you realise that it might be down to you to try to make a difference.

One woman decided to campaign about a magazine that had sexual content in it and try to get it removed from her newsagent's shop. She wrote endless letters to the shop, the publishers and anyone else who would listen. The book was removed from publication.

One man visited an African country where one day a small boy asked if he could have the man's t-shirt. He had no other clothes with him so he ignored the boy. But when he got home he advertised for unwanted t-shirts and got so many thousands that he had to create a business to ship them out to the place where he had once visited.

And I don't think Peter had to take massive leaps before he took small steps. Small steps can change things. Just compare the possibilities with

that story Jesus told of a man who was scolded by Jesus for burying his talent and wasting his opportunities, not fulfilling his potential.

What holds us back from walking on water? Fear of the unknown? A sense that “*I'm too old for this water-walking nonsense*”? Letting go of what was cherished and important? They're all good reasons.

But think about Peter. Instead of just coping on his own, he now knew – again- that he could trust Jesus not to let him fall. Peter had come closer to the power and the love of God; Peter had the exhilaration of a new experience and knew that in combination with Jesus he could do bigger things; he knew that when he looked into Jesus' face he could do big things and when he focused on the surroundings, the wind and waves looked too frightening; he knew that when he really did need saving, Jesus would save. His world view expanded, his little boat didn't have to stay at the centre of his world. It may have been a brief time of water walking but it made him grow and see things in an altogether new way.

With a resurrection life offered, and a hope of heaven too, we don't even have to limit our view to this life. There's more to come!

So that's the offer for us too. God has given us boats to make our world and keep us safe but there are times when we need to get out (even if we then get back in again!) and trust him to fill us with life and spirit and power and to walk on water. If your world has become very small for any reason then maybe today is the time to start praying that you'll see him and be able to step out over the edge.

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