

Switch on with John

Part 1

John 6: Jesus Walks on the Water

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.

¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

This month we are switching on with John. Not often enough do we look at the gospels to hear and see the word and actions of Christ because really when it comes to understanding our faith, there is no better place to go than straight to the source.

Tonight I want to Jesus walking on the water. John tells it differently to Mark and Matthew.

In all 3 gospels this story comes just after the feeding 5000 story so this is important context, this is what has just happened.

After leaving the crowds, at the feeding of 5000, the crowds want to find Jesus and make him their king. Jesus retreats to the mountains and Jesus sent the disciples off – packs them up in a boat, a big row boat of some sort, says off you go.

Now I hate having to travel at night, hate doing a long drive at night. But they have to row across the lake at night, even less fun. And a storm picks up...

Have you seen those pictures of the ferries, getting through the heads in storms – it looks pretty terrifying... But imagine doing it in a row boat in the middle of the night!

The Jews are not a sea faring nation, they don't do well on water, probably not good swimmers, the sea is always used as a symbol of fear and a lot of people die in ship wrecks.... very dangerous form of transport.

They left v17 after it was dark, so maybe 8pm. In Matthew's telling Jesus doesn't arrive until its almost dawn so they have been out there for hours – maybe 8 hours, if is 4am – fighting for their lives, in total darkness, battling the waves. Tired exhausted, thinking of all the possibilities, getting capsized, trying to swim to shore,

slowly sinking under form exhaustion. It would have been a hellish night on the water.

In verse 19, they are 3 or 4 miles out, in all this time that's all they have managed, then Jesus comes out to meet them. Walking on the water he says "it is I, don't be afraid". A more literal translation would be "it is, I AM" don't be afraid. Of course he is telling them something here – Jesus is implying that he is more than just a man and prophet...

John then focuses on something that Mark and Matthew don't - he focuses on the people on the shore where they left. They look and see only one boat has left, realising that JC was not on the boat they realise something miraculous has happened, but don't know what. They were there at the feeding 5000, but now there is a second mystery.

This passage starts with people looking for Jesus, finished with them looking for him. They want to make his a King so he retreats up a mountain to be alone, to escape. But in this miracle Jesus is revealing to them who it is they want to make King and how they are miss understanding his purpose here in Israel.

In verse 15 the people saw the miracle of the 5000 and wanted Jesus to be king, they wanted Jesus to be something they knew and could understand, something that would benefitted them right here and now. Jesus would have been a great king, Herod was just a roman puppet. In the Passion of the Christ they portray him as a disgusting slob that just wants to drink and have sex, cares only about himself. Think how perfect it would have been to have JC as King, his great moral teaching, his wisdom, spiritual powers. But Jesus sees this coming, so he retreats up the Mountain, sends the disciples off, so that he might show them who and what he is and not become what they want him to be.

The European artists always get a hard time for painting Jesus white but if you look at art from around the world all artists paint him in their own ethnicity – Asians paint him looking Asian, Africans, Native Americans etc. Not because they are all racist or whatever but I think, it's because in Jesus they see themselves – they see one of them and sometimes we are guilty of the same thing. We create an image of Jesus the way we want him to be.

John's telling is different from Mark and Matthew mainly in that John tells it from the spectator's perspective and Mark and Matthew tell it from Jesus' point of view. And what we see in John is Jesus further trying to open our eye to who he is – who he really is.

So often we try to shape Jesus into who we want him to be. We chose who and what our God it like. So often I hear people speaking for Jesus, what he would like and not like. For example someone might say Jesus would love the boat people; Jesus would not love gay marriage; Jesus would tax the rich more; Jesus would not let Muslims into our country; and before we know it we have 1000 different Jesus, we have painted Jesus just like us. Saying and thinking just like we do, creating him to be just what we want, not what he is.

The people on the shore, that see the miracle of the feeding 5000, they wanted Jesus to be their king, get rid of useless Herod, kick out the Romans, get rid of Roman

taxation because that is what they wanted him to be, not what he was, not what he had come to be.

This lady from Coles, I spoke about earlier – who was not a believer, had a distant catholic upbringing – was saying to me that Jesus wouldn't feed them sugar. That's not what Jesus would do... well ...that not what you would do. She just couldn't imagine Jesus doing something she thought was wrong. I said to her, Jesus gave them fishes and loaves "well tricked into giving them bread" (because she was paleo, and grains are bad for you apparently). Her image of Jesus did only the things she thought was right.

And we often try to do this, we try to shape him, when he should shape us.

Here Jesus retreats up the hill to escape being made king then he goes and performs another miracle so they could start to understand more about who he is, so he could shape them... not them shape him.

The question is: When Jesus speaks, when you read his words, how does that shape you?

When Jesus says "he who is without sin, cast the first stone" how does that shape you?

When Jesus "weeps at the death of Lazarus" how does that shape you?

When Jesus says "you cannot serve God and money" how does that shape you?

When Jesus says "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"; "The first shall be last and the last shall be first"; "I am the way the truth and the life", how does that shape you?

The word of God is a precious Gift. It holds the eternal truths that shape and change us, into the image of God. But often we treat it like a chore, like a hassle. How will we ever know who Jesus really is if we never listen to what he has to say? Here's the take home application for this week, read your Bible, read John.

Not ground breaking stuff is it? To know the God who knows you perfectly, knows the hairs on your head? Read it on the bus to work, while you are waiting for your coffee, while are downloading that update, before you go to bed.

Think about this: Jesus send the disciples out on the lake that night knowing the storm would blow in, knowing they would struggle and battle the wind and the waves, and knowing they would be fearful and exhausted out there on that lake. Why? Because everything that happened that night was designed to shape them. That when they are in the depths of fear and exhaustion, Jesus would be there. He would come to them and say "don't fear, I Am", "don't fear because I am God".

There are things in your life, things scary and difficult, often that are there to shape you – sent to make you who you are, to form you and sharpen you. And as you confront these challenges Jesus is there, telling us "do not be afraid, because I AM".

If your faith is being rocked by the storms of life, Jesus is there, walking on the water, watching you, forming you into who he wants you to be.