

Reflection for Pentecost 10 by Jacqueline Kemp (Reader)

The story continues after the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples decide to go home, across the lake. Jesus stays to see the crowd leaving and to spend time in prayer alone, so the disciples leave without him. In the dark, the wind gets up and the disciples pull down the sail and row. Before daylight they see a figure (possibly Jesus) coming from the shore towards the boat. As he comes closer, Peter recognises Jesus and jumps overboard, encouraged by Jesus, but soon founders and begins to sink. Jesus helps him and they both are able to get back into the boat.

It is the experience of Peter that intrigues me. He had been recognised as the future leader of this new way of relating to God that Jesus preached. To many of us he is an encouraging example, because despite his absolute commitment to Jesus, he also had very human faults. He was strong but also impetuous, jumping into deep water in his enthusiasm to join Jesus is just one example recorded in the gospels.

As Jesus rescues Peter, his words are significant. *Jesus reached out his hand. He helped Peter up and said, "You certainly don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?"* (verse 31)

I acknowledge that faith is not even. We come away from a church service or other Christian gathering sometimes with a joyful step, spiritually inspired and ready to live a life infused with faith. But there are other times when we feel tired or grumpy. Maybe people whom we like and respect have questioned our beliefs. When we withdraw to pray, we have lost all sense of the presence of God. Jesus rescued Peter at that point and we also need a lifeline.

I am presently reading a book which has a chapter on Faith followed one about Doubt. So many Christians feel that they have failed if they have doubts. The writer is reassuring. Questioning is part of the human condition, an asset to further learning as anyone who has been with a young child in the 'why' phase will acknowledge. She says that Faith and Doubt are two sides of the same coin. To face the doubt, with God's help and maybe a meaningful talk with another Christian reinforces faith.

When Paul sent letters to the early Christian gatherings, it was sometimes to people who were being persecuted. Then he was reassuring about their calling but also clear that Jesus did not offer anyone an easy ride. Jesus himself suffered and died at the hands of the powerful because of what he was preaching. But public crucifixion was not the end of the story as we know. The life of Jesus ended in triumph.

Our faith is challenged by crises, both global and personal. Among them this present pandemic and the economic outcomes which will deprive people of their livelihoods. Climatic disasters; drought, floods, crop failure, bush fires. Personal losses are not any less challenging. The young couple who are told their baby will die. The accident which leaves an active adult crippled for life. And yet there is hope.

When the twin towers in New York were brought down deliberately by a plane, the pilots shouted Allah Akbah (God be praised) as they died. We want to cry out "Where is God in all this?" In the midst of all these challenges some are tempted to say, "If this is what God allows I don't want to believe in him any more." God is there all the time and God is good.

There are times when faith becomes thin. Even when I just sit quietly and say, "Be still and know that I am God", meditation becomes daydreams and I need a spiritual lifeline. I told Revd. Michael about my prayer sheet. It was written by my spiritual adviser, an old and pious priest who is now long dead. When the cautious release of the pandemic lockdown allowed us to open the church for private prayer, I shared this prayer sheet with Revd. Michael who made copies available for visitors. There are still some left.

I pray that this reflection on Peter's example, will bless you in your Christian life. Amen.