

Readings:

1Kings 19:9-18

Matthew 14 22-33

² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, ²⁵ for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, ³¹ he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

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It has frequently been said, over the past few months, that we are all in the same boat. To some extent this is true. COVID 19 has affected everyone's lives around the globe. In other ways, it is patently untrue. We know that those who are shielding have walked a harder path than those who are not. Those who live in villages and small towns with substantial gardens have suffered far less than those in tower blocks. Those of us in our 50s and 60s have found it easier to keep to ourselves than teenagers and young adults whose most significant relationships may well be outside their immediate households. Those who are white, and women or children, with financial resources and robust mental health and safe homes and available education and entertainment, are, it could be argued, in an entirely different boat to some of the other groups in our society. Added to which, even those which might seem from a technical point of view, to be in a similar boat, have different priorities, different principles, different ways of expressing themselves – and we find ourselves carefully and cautiously navigating social waters, as we try to live together in harmony, patience and understanding – despite the fact that everyone – inevitably – feels that they are the one in the right...

If we are not even all in the same boat, it is not surprising that we are all wanting to get out of our boats at different rates and in different ways, and within the guidelines and the laws that are set out for us, there are still a multitude of choices for us to make – these can be exhausting even on a personal level – on a family level they can be more difficult – and on a community level they can be a real struggle.

The COVID 19 crisis has brought to the front of our minds what was always true – that people are very different – that it can be hard to accept that others hold to their principles as strongly as we hold to ours - and that we need work and pray to find ways of living together in faith, hope and love for the good of all – even (and perhaps especially) when we are in uncharted and frightening territory.

Our gospel reading finds Jesus and his disciples in exciting, challenging and confusing times. The disciples were gradually becoming aware of what they had signed up for, and who they had signed up with. They had seen miracles, and they had begun to wonder what this meant for them now, and what it meant for their future. The reaction of most of them, when seeing Jesus crossing to

them on the water, was to stay in boat and wait for him. Not everyone is a Peter – and whether Peter made a sensible decision on that day on the sea is certainly a question up for debate. Certainly we know that Jesus did not in anyway criticise those who chose to stay in the boat, and that the disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus with wonder in their hearts recognising him as the Son of God. In fact, much as we might sometimes commend the courage it takes to step out in faith, the only criticism Jesus made that day was of Peter, who on his own instigation had chosen to walk out into the water, only to bottle out halfway through, lose his courage and need saving.

Most of you will be aware that there is a questionnaire in circulation from the St Raphael community asking you various questions about where we have been over the last few months as a worshipping community and where we envisage being in the next few months. I would be very grateful if you are able to fill that in within the next week or so, adding other comments if you wish, as it will be used to inform our plans as we move forwards. Please do pass on the questionnaire to anyone who is not online so that everyone has an opportunity to respond and please feel free to be honest about both your concerns

and your hopes. It is unlikely that, given the restrictions we face, and the different needs, hopes and concerns of all our congregation, that we will be able to find a perfect answer that seems ideal to everyone, but we will need to continue to listen, respond and support one another as we go forward. I am expecting that we will need to continue to provide some kind of “mixed economy” in terms of worship opportunities and resources over the next few months, and that every single one of us will continue to be asked to make some sacrifices for the sake of others, and continue to be flexible in the ways we are able to come close to God together, and as we look after one another.

In these days that seem to be becoming more, rather than less, complicated, with so much change, anxiety and confusion, where will we find God? God, I am convinced, is in our boat with us, as we worship him and acknowledge that he is Lord over even the most uncontrollable aspects of the physical world – whether that be the waves of the Galilean sea or a new virus. Equally, he is with us when we take bold steps of faith out

into the unknown, ready to save us when we stumble and doubt.

He is, we must not forget, in our neighbour’s boat too – our neighbour who thinks differently from us, who is in another boat entirely, and he values the integrity, the courage, the compassion of all, and urges us on in loving one another at this time.

At the heart of our attempts to live Godly lives at the moment must be a commitment to listen, to hear, to love, and to acknowledge that we live without easy answers. Our reading from the Hebrew scriptures reminds us that Elijah heard God not in noise or drama, not in chaos or impressive displays, but in a quiet whisper, easily overlooked and easily ignored. God whispers encouragement to us to be patient with one another and with society, to listen and to love, to adapt, to pray, to be confident that he is with us all walking this strange journey.

Though we are all in different boats, we are, as people who are doing their best to follow God’s way, all trying to move in the same direction –growing in understanding and compassion, closer to God and closer to one another. Jesus and the Saints travel with us. They too have known

uncertainty and divisions and they have overcome. They remind us that with all our differences of opinions, our hopes and fears, when we are guided by love we will find a way through. Amen.

Collect

Almighty God,
Who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the light and life of your Church:
Open our hearts to the riches of your grace
That we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
In love and joy and peace
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord
Who is alive and reigns with you
In the unity of the Holy Spirit
One God now and forever,
Amen