

Earlier this year 3 brothers from Scotland set an astonishing world record after rowing 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean in just 35 days in a 28ft long rowing boat.

During that record-breaking row, the MacLean Brothers from Edinburgh completed 1.5 million strokes, through heavy storms, 40ft waves and shark infested waters.

Like the MacLean brothers, that Gospel reading says the disciples are having to navigate through their own violent storm.

So, in Verse 24 we're told they're a long way from land, its dark, the winds against them and they're being battered by heavy waves.

And I imagine that even for these experienced fishermen it's a scary situation for them to be in.

But you know if that's bad enough, we're then told in verse 25 that a figure appears in the darkness walking towards them on the water.

As a result, they're understandably terrified; and cry out: It's a ghost! As they catch sight of this eerie figure walking towards them on the waves

But then in all the fear and confusion, Jesus speaks to them and says:

Take heart it is I, do not be afraid.

Can you imagine the relief as they hear those words?

You see in that moment as Jesus identifies himself to the disciples, all their fear and anxiety melts away as he tells them not to be scared.

And you know this whole account kind of illustrates what life can be like, especially when circumstances catch us off guard, or we feel helpless and out of control. It's like we're a tiny boat being tossed around on a raging sea.

And of course, the current pandemic has made a lot of us feel like that.

Because in so many ways our lives have been turned upside down

As a result, we feel anxious in the present, and fear for the future.

And like the disciples battling against the storm we can feel that our lives are out of control, as we're battered and bruised by the current situation.

If that's you let this passage comfort and encourage you this morning.

Because you see in all the difficulties, fear, and uncertainties of life; Jesus says take heart, I'm with you. Do not be afraid, because he has complete control over the situation.

And it's a wonderful promise that reassures us even in the most difficult of circumstances.

So, to illustrate

In the 1960s a woman called Helen Roseveare was a missionary in the Congo.

And one night her house was broken into by members of a rebel army who were trying to topple the government and take over the country.

And she says that as these soldiers were rounding people up, she tried to run away but was dragged back beaten and severely abused by the men.

She then says as I stood trembling on the veranda, the lieutenant of this rebel army struck a pistol in my face and was about to shoot me because I wouldn't renounce Christ.

It was then in all my weakness that I felt the Lord say: Can you thank me?

And of course, every ounce of my energy wanted to scream out NO!

How could I thank him for this wickedness and evil? But his quiet voice went on: Can you thank me for trusting you... That was an amazing thought! For me to trust Jesus, yes, I knew that; but for him to trust me...?

Again, he said: Can you thank me for trusting you with this experience even if I never tell you why I've allowed it to happen?

Helen goes on: Somehow, in the darkness of that appalling night, I managed to say to my dear Lord, I don't understand what you may be doing.

I was certain I'd be killed, but yes, if you ask this of me, thank you for trusting me with this experience, even if you never tell me why.

Well I wonder if Jesus can trust you and me with the pain, sadness, and frustration life throws at us, even if we never understand why they happen.

And initially things must've been just as confusing for the disciples being tossed around in that boat.

You see verse 22 says that it's Jesus who sends these men out in the first place; and then leaves them to battle the storm for hours, before he even goes to them.

But you know I think that detail's there to show us that God will allow difficult experiences to strengthen our faith; and see if he can trust us with them.

And we see that in verse 28 don't we, where it says that as Jesus approaches the boat, Peter shouts out:

"Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

And it's an amazing request, because even though Peter must be as terrified as the other disciples, he has enough faith to know that even in this terrible storm, the only

solid ground the men have, and the safest place to be, is outside the boat with Jesus, even when the situation seems impossible.

But you know as commendable as Peter's faith is initially, he takes his eyes off the ball; and starts to focus on the situation instead of on Jesus.

And so, he looks at the waves and the storm and the impossibility of walking on water and starts to sink.

Well as a result in verse 31 Jesus says:

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt."

And you know we when we allow our doubts and fears get the better of us, especially when things are tough it can be the same for us.

You see so we start off well, but as the difficulties crowd in we take our eyes off Jesus; and start to sink under the weight of our circumstances.

But you know if we just focus on Peter's lack of faith and Jesus' rebuke, we miss a vital lesson.

You see although Peter's faith is weak and mixed with fear and doubt, as he starts to sink, his faith is real; he actually steps out of the boat and goes to Jesus walking on the water.

But more importantly than that, as Peter starts to falter, he isn't left to simply drown; no Jesus extends a hand to save him.

You see this passage isn't just about our faith but Christ's faithfulness and power to rescue us.

And so, as Peter cries out: Lord save me, Jesus reaches out a hand and takes hold of him.

And that's a great comfort and encouragement to us because like Peter our faith can be a mixture of doubt, trust, and fear.

And you know there'll be some of us watching this morning whose faith's being tested, and you feel battered and bruised.

You might've even have lost sight of Jesus altogether; and feel as though you're drowning under the weight of your circumstances.

Well if that's you, all you have to do is cry out like Peter: "Lord save me."

And Jesus will reach out his hand and take hold of you, because he loves you just as you are, with all you're faltering steps, fears, and doubts; and he never abandons anyone he's set his love on.

Well after contracting the coronavirus, former MP Hylton Murray-Philipson wrote this in the Spectator:

Of all the images that came to me in intensive care, the strongest of all was that of Jesus calming the storm.

At the time, if I coughed, I was unable to perform a following in-breath, as my lungs were full of infection.

I was being kept alive by a respirator forcing air into my lungs through a pipe inserted into my throat. This inability to breathe quickly turns to panic.

The appearance of Christ rising from sleep in the bow of the boat to calm the waters was precisely what I needed to calm the storm in my throat and in my mind. Jesus didn't address me, but I felt his piece radiating out from the boat towards me. My storm abated.

Well as Jesus enters the boat with Peter and the other disciple's verse 21 says:

They were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

You see in an imperfect world Jesus never promises a trouble-free life, in fact he warns his followers it'll be hard.

Now of course for some of us life might be great at the moment, but it won't always be like that; because grief, illness, and loss, will be a part of our experience at some point, and the storms will come.

But we can keep going; because when we cry out to Jesus in those dark times, we know that he has hold of us and will never allow to sink

So, this morning let's be encouraged to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, because you see ultimately, he'll lead us to the other side, to the dry land of our heavenly home.

And it's that hope of the future that gives us strength in the present.

You see life's journey won't always be straight forward, but our is destination secure; and we can keep going because the Son of God has a firm grip on us; and won't let us go.

Jesus says:

"Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Amen