

TFTD 23.19
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Wednesday March



Looking across the Sea of Galilee ...

Matt 14.1-36

Walking on water

Jesus said, Have courage! It's me. Don't be afraid. Matthew 14.27

Three stories, three different reactions to Jesus.

Isn't this the carpenter's son? (13.53-58). There's the reaction of bored indifference. In Jesus' hometown, Nazareth, the problem is people know him too well — or think they do. They know his family, they've watched him grow up, they've got the measure of him. Sometimes it's hardest to hear God's voice in familiar surroundings, from people we think we know. We need to learn to let God surprise us.

This is John the Baptist! (14.1-12) Then there's the reaction of superstitious dread. Herod has heard the gossip too — and he also thinks he knows who Jesus is. This isn't the Herod who tried to assassinate Jesus as a baby (ch.2), but one of his sons, Herod Antipas. Like his father, he recognizes the implied threat in Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of heaven, and tries hard to snuff it out. Like so many tyrants, Herod wields absolute power of life and death over his subjects. Yet Herod is as much a prisoner as John. He's trapped by his own luxury lifestyle, by the malice of an unscrupulous wife, and by keeping up appearances in front of his friends. In the end, it's John who emerges the moral victor from this sorry tale.

It is the Lord! Finally there's the reaction of risk-taking faith (14.13-36). John's death is a salutary warning to Jesus of the risks he is taking (14.13). But the needs of the crowd outweigh any thought of personal safety. And by staying close to Jesus, the disciples learn that where Jesus is, the kingdom is real and active: the helpless find compassion, the sick find healing, the hungry are fed. Living in the kingdom of heaven is like learning to walk on water — you need to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, you need to learn a whole new way of walking. Look at the odds, and you'll lose your nerve (and being human, that's what Peter does). But Jesus is there to catch him, to pull him to safety, and to calm the storm.

The boat-shaped altar from the church at Magdala



The disciples were now where Christ sent them, and yet met with this storm. It is no new thing for Christ's disciples to meet with storms in the way of their duty, and to be sent to sea then when their Master foresees a storm; but let them not take it unkindly. ...

Be not afraid: "Be not afraid of the tempest, of the winds and waves; fear them not, while I am so near you, and will not stand by and see you perish." Nothing needs to be a terror to those that have Christ near them, and know he is theirs; no, not death itself.. [Matthew Henry]

God bless, Loveday