

**Sermon: 2020/08/09 (10th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A) -
Genesis 37:1-4,12-28; Psalm 105:1-6,16-22,45b; Romans 10:5-15;
Matthew 14:22-33_BTR**

[Invite children forward.]

Under our feet, somewhere below us, is..."The Water-Table."

Do you know what that is?

I'll give you a clue: *not* furniture.

[Pause.]

Let me tell you:

when it rains the rainwater soaks down into the ground, doesn't it?

Gravity *suuucks* it down, and it would "suck" it all the way to the centre of the earth(!) except that, eventually, the rainwater "hits" up against a barrier that blocks it.

- Like rock. Something *hard*.

Some, of course, finds a way to flow into rivers and the sea, but some of the rainwater just "sits" there, constantly being replenished by new rainwater, draining down from the surface.

And "the water table" is the expression we use to describe that water - the water below our feet, trapped up against the rock.

This is the water that you see when you look down a well.

And, because in very dry countries that water - "the water table" - is only rarely replenished - since it doesn't rain very much, it is *very* low - deep, *deep* below the surface.

I saw such a thing in the Sudan (in Africa).

[Show photo.]

They tied the handle of a large bucket to a rope, and tied the other end of that rope to a yoke carried by this pair of donkeys, and then those donkeys would walk backwards to lower the empty bucket into the water, or walk forwards to raise it when it was full.

But, if it is *very* dry - like in the summertime, even the bottom of the well might not reach where "the water table" is.

The well would be *dry*.

And this is what probably happened to Joseph.

He was *thrown* into a dry well by his brothers - *ouch!*

They were bullies.

But God was with Joseph, even at the bottom of that dry well.
And He had a plan for Joseph.
And it wasn't to be bullied.
To be miserable.
To be lonely.
And the same is true for us!

Let's pray:
Lord God...

[Dismiss children to their seats.]

The Apostle Peter, *sitting in a boat*, saw Jesus 'walking toward [him. O]n[.] [T]he [S]ea'. [Mt. 14:25]

(That was, 'on the [S]ea' of Galilee or, in Hebrew, the "Kinneret."

Also called, "Lake Tiberias.")

Jesus walked '*on the sea*' as if it were *hard* ground;
the solid land itself.

As if it were...concrete - like the concrete of our pretty new patio here at St. Matthew's.

Jesus walked '*on the sea*' in such a way that He almost seemed to float (on it) as 'a ghost': [v.26].

And, seeing this *astonishing*, dream-like, *terrifying* spectacle, Peter went himself to do the same.

To walk '*on the sea*'.

And do you know what happened?

Physics.

Physics "happened."

And Peter sank.

Peter sank like a stone.

Peter sank like a human body *sinks* when it tries to walk on water. 🤪

Splash!

Down he went.

Almost certainly to his death - in principle; to the grave.

(The sea is about forty-metres deep: [n.1].)

However, Jesus reached down into that wet, *suffocating* darkness, and *lifted* Peter back to safety with the other fishermen.

And in doing so offers us a *perfect* picture of the Gospel.

Of how God, *through* Christ, "reached" into our world, so that, as Saint Paul

explains, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' [Rm. 10:13]

[Pause.]

But let's "unpack" this some more:

Jesus, we see, in the New Testament, identified in a number of places "as the Lamb of God," is, in other words, the *instrument* by which human beings, men and women, are granted an opportunity to have something He called, "life in abundance." [Jn. 10:10]

(Which is to say, a *joyous* life.

A fulfilling, *meaningful* life.

An *ETERNAL* life.)

Jesus - His death to be specific - is the "instrument" to salvation like literal wooden and brass instruments - a trumpet or a violin, *or the voice* itself, of course, is to making music.

Jesus is the "instrument" in that He is the *lifeguard*:

The lifeguard who must *exert* Himself - put Himself in harm's way; to *intervene* to rescue others; strangers - *us*.

You know, I was once rescued by a lifeguard.

At boarding school in England we had obligatory, weekly swimming lessons in our pool, which always seemed to be *awfully* hot.

The air-temperature (in the room), that is.

To compensate, I guess, for the fact that the pool itself was *freezing*.

(This was, probably, the school-governors had determined, the cheapest configuration for heating in there rather than the other way around. Anyway...)

Well, when I was fifteen-sixteen or thereabouts I began to - to use my mum's phrase - "*shoot up*."

I grew six or seven inches a year.

Up and up, like Jack's (magical) "beanstalk."

Stretched out like a gooey string of pink bubble-gum (as you see me today).

And what this meant was, was that my blood-pressure *plummeted*.

In particular, my head; my *brain* was suddenly *much* further from my heart than it had been.

And thus, on occasion, I would faint.

I'd *blackout*.

Usually during physical exercise.

(And now you can guess where this story is going.)

So, one day - during one of those weekly swimming lessons I just mentioned - I dove into the pool and promptly lost consciousness.

Vumpf!

Face-down.

Motionless. [Pause.]

The next thing I knew someone was shouting very loudly in my ear and manhandling me - rather roughly I must say - onto the tiles at the side.

And, not having all my faculties, I tried to fight back.

Who was this *savage* grabbing at me and yanking on my arm?
I flailed around and protested: "*Hey, get off me!*"
(Though, somewhat delirious and still spluttering, my appeal was rather garbled.)

Frankly, in all honesty, my life wasn't, in fact, in danger.
The lifeguard had responded immediately to the situation, alerted by the fact that the boy coming up the lane behind me had been "right on my tail," and was extremely annoyed to find me floating motionless in his way.
(We were sort of racing or something; doing lengths in rapid succession; lots of us in the water at the same time.)
And even as the lifeguard *leapt in* and took hold of me, I was already coming around having swallowed an obnoxious gulp of heavily chlorinated pool-water.)

But though I wasn't really in any danger *then*, I *am* fated to die; to destruction.
To, one day, breathe my last breath, and for this body to decompose in a grave.
That's a 100% *sure* thing.
And to be forgotten.

Unless you're a president, or a queen, or an astronaut or the like...
Can you even name your great-grandparents?

All *eight* of them?

Go on.

Try it.

I know I can't.

I think one was named "Martin" or something.
Named after the great Reformer, Martin *Luther*.
He was a preacher like me, a vicar.

But that's it!

Within a mere four generations not only are our bodies dust and dirt but even our reputations, our *names*, our *loves* and achievements are gone too.

Apart from the promise of the Cross.

Which we must *receive*.

Consciously and deliberately claim as our own.

You see, when Jesus reached into the 'sea' and grabbed Peter, don't you think that Peter grabbed back?

Of course, he did.

Imagine how, in his panic, as he sank, he too must have *flailed* around with his arms, not to push away as I ignorantly did, but looking to grasp *anything*.

And then there was Jesus.

Lifting him; *raising* him; *holding* him.

And Peter certainly clung on.

He was drowning!

Peter clung to Jesus as only a *drowning* man clings.

And so that prayer that Paul urges we pray: to 'confess with [our] lips that Jesus is Lord' [Rm. 10:9], believing in our hearts that His death *does* justify, and *opens* the gate of Heaven even to sinners like us...praying that prayer, reflecting that prayer in our lives and choices, that's us holding and clinging as Peter held and clung. It's simple, really.

But this is how we begin the 'race' [1 Cor. 9:24-25; Heb. 12:1] called "salvation;" how one begins to make their way to the place of bliss.

But does everyone know that?

Your friends and family?

Your spouse or colleague who doesn't attend here at this church.

Your neighbour or child who isn't watching this livestream right now?

'How are they to hear without someone to proclaim [it]?' Paul observes: [Rm. 10:14].

This is the challenge that today's epistle lies before us.

Footnotes:

1. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Galilee.