



Trinity VIII Sunday 9th August 2020 11 am

1 Kings 19.9-18 & Matthew 14. 22-33 (Sermon)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I do not think that there can be anyone who has not found themselves afraid at some point through the past 6 months.

If the word 'afraid' might be a bit too strong for some people, then 'fearful' maybe at least?

As the world woke up to the realities of the novel Corona Virus named "Covid-19" fear has stalked the streets of many cities – and, of course, still does.

Through the past seven months, we have come to learn a new way of behaving, a new language; some people have learned new skills and others have simply plumbed the depths of despair as loved ones, jobs, livelihoods, dreams have all been lost.

In today's Gospel reading, it is St Peter who is afraid. St Peter, "the Rock", the custodian of the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven; the Prince of the Apostles and of course, he is not the only character in Scripture who is afraid.

Fear stalks the pages of our Scriptures from the very beginning to almost the very end and, in both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek of the New Testament, again and again we come across

not only fear, but the assurance that, in God's love, we have nothing to fear. We hear assurance this morning on the lips of Jesus as he reaches out to Peter: "me phobeisthe", he calls out – "do not be afraid".

These words are an echo of the archangel Gabriel's words to Mary; they are, too, the words spoken to Joseph and to the shepherds in their all too understandable fear.

In Hebrew, they were the words spoken to the Patriarch Abram, as he hears the Lord summon him to set out on a terrifying journey that would see him travel 2000 km from the safety and prosperity of Ur of the Chaldees to a new and very uncertain homeland in Canaan.

"me phobeisthe" "me phobou" - "do not be afraid" or rather, "*don't run away! Don't flee!*". "*Do not be afraid*" is far too gentle and passive a translation of the Hebrew or the Greek.

Perhaps we should translate Jesus' words to Peter, and to Mary and to everyone who has cried out to God in despair as, "stay where you are and don't be afraid for where you are I am too", "stay where you are because, even though everything might be just too, too much for you to bear", "I am by your side", "do not be afraid, for the One who is "I am whom I am" is not going anywhere", "do not be afraid, for however this turns out I, the Lord, will never, ever leave you", "do not be afraid, for I will hold your hand, if only you will stretch out your hand and place it in my hand".

Abram puts his hand into God's hand, and he is led step by painful step towards a new homeland.

Mary listens to Gabriel's reassurance, stays put in Nazareth, places her hand into God's hand and the eternal Word of God, through whom all things had come into being, takes flesh in her womb.

Joseph, in his fear, does not pack up his tools, shut up shop and flee to another town where he was unknown; he does not abandon the love of his life or try to escape the censure and ridicule he knows will be his; he reaches out, puts his hand into God's hand and in time God's Son himself will be led through his childhood by holding onto Joseph's hand.

In time, St Peter, comes, through many trials and tribulations, to put his hand into the hand that is stretched out to him now on the deep and choppy waters of Galilee.

Abram, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, Peter, all were afraid.
All heard God's voice.
No-one fled.
No-one ran away.

Each one of them, found their hope and their reassurance, the courage to stretch out their hand and place it in God's hand, finding God's strengthening and upholding arm to bring them to safety.

Oh, how much do we need to hear the words, "me phobeisthe" "me phobou" - "do not be afraid", "*do not run away! Do not flee!*"

There is so much in our lives which causes us to fear and encourages us to up sticks, to take flight and hide ourselves away, not just Covid-19 - family difficulties, employment, unemployment, sickness, deep poisonous secrets which lie deep within us, feelings of failure or inadequacy; but like Abram and Mary and Joseph and countless others, God in Christ Jesus comes to us, stretches out his broken, fractured hands to us and says *do not be afraid*", "*do not run away*", "*do not flee*" because I promise to be with you, no matter what, no matter how great or deep your confusion or your pain, your brokenness or your despair.

"immediately Jesus spoke and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'
Amen.