

There are some days that you remember for the rest of your life and of course I hope that this will be one of those for Rosie Foster who is being baptised later. It does help now that we can take photos and video so that you can relive the day over and again. With today being such a positive event I hope Rosie that you will always want to revisit the day.

But of course there are days which we would rather forget. I did feel sorry for Michael Fish again this week as he was reminded how on the evening of 15th Oct 1987 giving out the weather forecast he commented that a woman had rung in saying she'd heard that there was a hurricane on the way and he then said "if you are watching don't worry there isn't" before one of the fiercest storms ripped across the South east destroying buildings and uprooting hundreds of trees. A day I'm sure he'd like to forget but isn't allowed to.

I should think that throughout his life Peter carried some of the days he'd been through very clearly in his mind. The day on which he denied that he was a follower of Jesus was probably one of them. But then I should think that the day described in this passage was towards the top of the list. It was a very topsy-turvy day wasn't it?

1. What happened...

The day seems to have begun with the news of the death of John the Baptist. That caused Jesus to take the 12 disciples away for a bit of rest and refreshment. However, as we see in v13 the crowds followed. Then Peter and the others watched as Jesus healed many and presumably taught the crowds. At the tail end of the day Peter was involved in handing round the bits of the five loaves and two fish which served over 5000 people – amazing. What a day – Peter would remember this day for a long time.

But the day wasn't over as we see as we come to the passage for today.

Jesus made his disciples get back into the boat to go back over the other side of Galilee while he dismissed the crowd. These men, with Peter among them, set off but progress seems to have been a bit slow because they had the wind and waves against them (14:24).

It was during the later part of the night that the disciples became aware of this figure walking on the water towards them. Their response was that this must be a ghost. However, Jesus spoke to reassure them that it was him.

Peter immediately reacted, "'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'" (14:28). The words show a mind divided. Peter spoke to Jesus as Lord, which could just be a normal form of address but said to one walking on the water suggests an acceptance of Jesus' deity and that is supported by the words "tell me to come". Peter was placing himself at the command of

Jesus who he saw as Lord, as God. However, there is also uncertainty “if it’s you”. Could this really be Jesus?

Jesus replied with one word “come” at which Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus. Now whatever else we might say about Peter he alone had the courage to get out of the boat.

However, all did not go well and suddenly becoming aware of the strength of the wind and the waves around him Peter began to sink and called out to Jesus for help, which Jesus provided and restored him to the boat. Upon doing that the wind died down. It was not a day Peter would want to remember and Jesus’ words to him perhaps didn’t help, ““You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (14:31).

2. What caused doubt?

What caused Peter’s problems? Well Jesus seems to have summed it up. He had little faith and that caused doubt. Now we must be careful to understand this properly. Little faith is not about size it is about the essential nature of his faith.

Jesus described Peter as a person of faith. Faith is the trust in God which makes us act in reliance on him. Peter demonstrated his faith in Jesus as God by getting out of the boat. However, his faith, his trust was described by Jesus as “little” on the basis that his understanding of who Jesus is was flawed and therefore his trust in him was limited.

The question was “why did you doubt” or what caused you to doubt. The answer must be the circumstances in which he found himself. Accepting Jesus as God he responded to the command to get out of the boat but then aware of the situation he was in he began to doubt that he could walk on water because he was not yet really aware of who this Jesus is.

It would only be after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension that Peter would really understand Jesus as God and then be willing to put his whole life on the line in faith. Here he still had questions as to who this man was and it was that flawed understanding which caused him to doubt.

As we look at Peter it was a. his uncertainty in who Jesus is and b. an acute awareness of his circumstances that caused doubt and left him floundering.

Many Christians experience doubt during their Christian lives and there are many reasons for that. Os Guinness in his book ‘Doubt – faith in two minds’ suggests at least seven. I just want to focus this morning on these two

a. a lack of understanding of God and

b. turmoil created by the circumstances around us.

a. For Peter out there on the Sea of Galilee clearly what came into his mind was is Jesus sufficient for this? Along with the other disciples his understanding of who Jesus is was not clear at this point.

Many people will I know dismiss this whole event as impossible. Human beings, they will say, don't walk on water. In that statement they have made a judgement call on Jesus describing him as just another human. However, Jesus as God, as creator of the world and Lord over all of creation can walk on water. It depends upon how we view Jesus. As a Christian and someone who believes in Jesus as God I don't have any problems with accepting that Jesus walked on water. However I can think back to a day about 6 months before I came to faith and I had a very different view point. I was staying with a friend and one morning he had gone out and the doorbell went and it was 2 Jehovah's Witnesses. We got into a debate and I gave them a very firm opinion that the miracles in the Bible were not as written why because human beings don't walk on water etc. So often our doubts have their origin in a poor understanding of who God is. Will I pray for my sick friend if I am not sure God is able to heal, if I doubt his power to work in the present? Will I pray for my sick friend if I am not sure that God is perfectly good and that his will for us is based on his perfect goodness? In other words if my understanding of God is flawed then my faith will be limited.

While our understanding of God is flawed so we will doubt and so we will not be able to act in trust and faith in response to him.

b. but as we also know **circumstances of life can create doubt** even when our understanding of God and trust in him is strong. If we lose a loved one, or if there is illness or we lose a job the very circumstances of life can be like waves washing over us and we can find ourselves floundering. In part it is the pressure of the events and in part it is the fact that we have not been on this path before and so our faith has not been tested in this way.

I can remember at one point experience a difficult problem and walking through some woods with tears running down my face talking with God and asking the question "why?" My understanding of God had not changed but the problem was big and I had not faced it before, or since I am pleased to say, and I was floundering asking where is God in this.

I would imagine many of us have been there.

As I said earlier many Christians experience doubt during their Christian lives and as Vaughan Roberts points out in his book 'Battles Christians Face' "doubt is not sinful, but it is serious. If it is not addressed properly it could lead further down the road from faith to unbelief and away from God."

3. What is the answer to doubt?

a. Getting the facts right

You may well be familiar with the poem Feeling faith and facts. Three men were walking on a wall, Feeling, Faith and Fact. When Feeling got an awful fall then Faith was taken back. So close was Faith to Feeling, that he stumbled and fell too, but Fact remained and pulled Faith back, And Faith brought Feeling too.

It is about the relationship in our lives of these things and the importance that faith is built on facts not on feelings. As Martin Ayres in his book 'Keep the Faith' points out "God does not ask us to believe despite the facts." Some of our critics will describe the Christian faith as taking a leap in the dark or as "believing what ain't true". Martin Ayres goes on, "The eyewitnesses of Jesus of Nazareth had faith in him and his claims because of the evidence they had observed elsewhere." The Christian faith is built on the testimony of the apostles in the word of God. It is a historic faith. Luke at the start of his gospel says he is writing history. So if we wish to have a faith strong enough to withstand the battles of life we need to be focused on the truth as brought to us through the word of God. Get the facts of our faith right. Let's understand why we believe Jesus is God and why we believe in heaven. This is why our study of the Bible be it in church, in homegroups or on our own is so important. We need to be strengthening our foundations so that we can stand the many things that come against us. Over the weeks we will mention many books. There is a display of some of them in the entrance area – books which are good to read and help underpin our faith.

b. Get the perspective right

Part of the problem for Peter it would seem was that instead of looking at Jesus he started looking elsewhere, at the wind and the waves and then, if you'll pardon the pun, he was sunk. Is that not how it is in our lives that sometimes we get things out of perspective. Please I am not suggesting that Peter's situation was not difficult or that the situation facing you is not difficult but it is a matter of getting things into the perspective of Jesus as God, his power to act and the light of eternity. I once heard someone say, "do not doubt in the dark what you know to be true in the light." However that is often what happens isn't it. Doubt comes in on the back of unruly emotions. Something bad happens and we begin to doubt God, his power or his goodness, or his faithfulness. I am not suggesting here that we are so heavenly minded as to be no earthly use but that we recognise what we are going through as "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

I remember many years ago going to Portugal. We were booked into a nice hotel. We got there in the evening and when I looked out of the window I could see very little except when I looked down I could see the dustbins. Great I thought a nice hotel on the Algarve and I have a view of the dustbins. Next morning when I got up I opened the blind and there before me was an amazing view of the swimming pool and beyond the golden beach and sea. Yes if I looked down I could see the dustbins but when I lifted my eyes it was the amazing view that held my gaze.

We need regularly to lift our eyes up from the rubbish that is there in our lives, which could well create doubts in us, to the living Lord who reigns in heaven and recognise he is Lord and his will for us is perfect. How do we lift our eyes, how do we refocus on Jesus? I think fellowship is key, being

with other Christians. As we share in worship, in communion, in homegroup, in prayer partnerships or whatever fellowship is vital in helping us in the dross of life to lift our eyes and to remove the doubts.

c. Perseverance is key.

As Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). We have not, as Peter was, been privileged to see Jesus in the flesh. We therefore follow him by faith. Yes as I have suggested it is a reasonable thing to do based on facts. However, it does mean that we cannot prove faith. We cannot prove God exists anymore than the atheist can prove he doesn’t. So in faith there are lots of loose ends and there will be questions we cannot answer. So we live by faith and God calls as his children to persevere in following Jesus Christ with the assurance that while “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.” (1 Cor 13:12) Until then let’s fix our eyes on Jesus and trust him in everything as our saviour and our Lord.