

This short act of worship has been produced for you.
If you are well enough and able,
why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time
when you would normally be sharing with others in church
and pray for them as they pray for you.

Greeting: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father (Singing the Faith 238)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqzau4v23m0>

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
through the desert thou didst go.
Spirit of our God descending,

fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-18.67)

Prayer of praise

Eternal God,

we praise you because you have shown us in Jesus
that you are not a distant and unfeeling God.

We praise you that in him you shared our human life to
the full, experiencing the anguish of pain, doubt, and
bereavement, and the delight of friendship, pleasure, and joy.
In anxiety and despair as in joy and gladness
may we put our trust in you and praise you as we ought;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Today's reading: Matthew 14:22-33 (NRSV)

In the midst of a storm on a lake Jesus rescues bold
impetuous frightened Peter when he tries to walk on water.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and
go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.
And after he had dismissed the crowds he went up to the
mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Time to reflect

'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' Matthew 14:27 (NRSV)

Fearful, uncertain, in crisis, daring to step out then losing confidence, hesitant, vulnerable... all part of human experience writ large in our lives, in our gospel reading, and in the life of the church through the ages.

Here are the disciples in the dark of night - and, of course, any difficulty or trouble always seem so much worse during the night - in their boat (from early days a symbol of the church) battered by the waves, far from land, the wind against them. This evocative picture speaks of a raging sea, ancient symbol of the forces of evil and chaos only God can tame.

And early in the morning Jesus comes to his disciples, walking the water of their danger, revealing divine power and glory. To the disciples' terrified and fearful cries, he answers, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' (Matthew 14:27) 'It is I' meaning literally 'I am', the divine One. Jesus' response to their need is immediate, offering divine words of comfort and reassurance.

So far the evangelist Matthew follows Mark; now he adds to the story, telling of Peter's attempt to walk on water. 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' To Jesus' bidding 'Come', Peter courageously responds and sets out, but on noticing the strong wind he becomes frightened. When his confidence falters he starts to sink and in terror he cries out to Jesus, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reaches out his hand and catches him, saying, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' - or 'why did you hesitate?'

In face of the threatening life-storm we're all going through it would be all too easy to lose sight of God in the midst of our fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

The seeming darkness of our situation may throw our self-belief and our faith and trust in God. We may even feel as if we're drowning or 'going under'. Acutely aware of our vulnerability and our aloneness we, too, may find ourselves crying out, 'Lord, save me!'

The guardian grace of Christ does not shelter us from life-storms or take the demands of life's challenges from us, but is to be found in the very midst of them. And God in Christ meets us in our need, walking with us in the dark centre of the human storm to bring us safely home. When we stumble or falter or hesitate, Christ reaches out to forgive and save.

We're told that when Jesus and Peter get back into the boat, the wind ceased and the disciples worshipped Jesus, saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.' Just as in creation God tamed the sea, the forces of evil and chaos, so in Christ all that would destroy or demean us is overpowered.

Let us take heart, assured that - whatever besets us in this life - Christ is present in the midst, reaching out to encourage us by his presence to face the storm. 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

A prayer for this week

Gracious God, in both the calm and storm of life bid us come to you that we, who know our weakness, may be strengthened in the faith of Christ, incarnate, crucified, and risen. **Amen.**

A time of prayer (trusting that others pray with us)

We use the bidding and response:

Merciful God, we call to you,
save us and help us.

Let us pray for people who live daily with life-storms of conflict, war, drought or famine:

for those who feel battered by waves of oppression, violence, or unmet basic human need of water and food,
for those who feel that they are sinking beyond help,
and for all who work for peace, justice, and restoration of life.

Let us pray for people who reach out in faith to you and for those who have asked for our prayers or support:

for those who feel battered by waves of fear, anxiety or despair,
for those sinking beneath a load of care, overwhelmed by the demands and needs of others, or hiding as if in the dark, too frightened to face the day,
and for all who care for, support, and sustain others.

Let us remember with thanksgiving all those beyond this world's demands or storms now at rest in you that we with them may share in your eternal joy and peace, praying as one people in heaven and on earth as our Saviour taught us,

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Best of all is God is with us (Singing the Faith 610)

*Sing it to the tune ALL FOR JESUS (Singing the Faith 341) /
Read/Pray/Proclaim the words*

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging.
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

*Andrew Pratt (b. 1948)
Based on John Wesley's final words*

Blessing

Becalmed or beset by life's storms,
the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you now and remain with you always. **Amen.**