**Difficult Circumstances 22 March 2020**

**Intro**

I want to talk to you today about difficult circumstances.

We are all, very aware of the global crisis going on at this very moment but I don’t intend talking about the coronavirus today.

I am aware that many of us are walking through difficult personal circumstances right now and what I have to share with you this morning, is the word of God to you in your situation.

Read Matthew 14:22 – 33

So, Jesus sends the disciples on their way across a lake in a boat to where they’re going next. He then spends the night by himself praying. Just before dawn, Jesus walks across the lake to catch them up! When the disciples see him, they think he’s a ghost and are terrified. Jesus speaks to them and Peter says the craziest thing ever which is “if it’s really you Jesus, tell me to come and walk on the water to you!” Why was that the first thing that came into his head, I’ll never know!

Jesus tells him to come and Peter does the 2nd craziest thing ever which is to get out of the boat and start walking on the water to Jesus. Then he gets scared by the wind and begins to sink and Jesus rescues him.”

**So that’s what happened, what does God want us to hear out of this account today?**

1. **If you are going through difficult circumstances right now, the first thing you need to know is that God is allowing it!**

V 22 “Jesus **made** the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side of the lake.” And then he went off by himself to pray and was gone most of the night

**Jesus set this up!**

I can hear some of you shouting back at me….why?

Why would a loving God, a God who supposed to love me, allow me to go through what I’m going through?

Some of you may be reacting with “well if God’s allowing me to go through this rubbish, I don’t want to know Him”

Others of you, may just not believe me. You may think that the God you know and love wouldn’t set up difficult circumstances for you to go through.

Psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd is one of the most well-known and comforting psalms.

It says - “The Lord is my shepherd - He guides me along the right paths

Then the next verse says “even though I walk through the darkest valley”

And the next verse “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies”

God - our shepherd guides us along the right paths and some of those paths go through the darkest of valleys, where there doesn’t seem to be any light.

He prepares things where we have to keep functioning and get through the day to day stuff, surrounded by our enemies

Psalm 23 says so and this verse in Matthew says that Jesus **made** the disciples go across the lake without him.

God allows us to go through difficult circumstances….we’ll come to the why in a moment

Read v 22 – 24

So the disciples had been through quite a lot before Jesus appeared

* The day they had had before this, was feeding the 5,000 – an incredibly emotional and physically exhausting day
* It was now the middle of the night and the boat was a long way from shore - so they’d been in a small boat, buffeted by the waves for hours in complete darkness – they must have been exhausted

Read v 25

Then Jesus turns up miraculously! Walking on top of the water to them!

1. **If you are going through difficult circumstances right now, the second thing you need to know is….**

**No matter how adrift you feel,**

**no matter how much you have already been knocked or shaken,**

**no matter how dark the darkness is around you**

**no matter how far your situation has gone……**

**Jesus can and will show up!**

**Because He is the God of the miraculous.**

Read v 26

**Q = Why on earth did they not recognise Him?**

* These men were with Jesus every single day, they knew him - he didn’t look any different!
* They knew he could do miracles – the very day before he had fed 5,000 men plus women plus kids by multiplying the lunchbox of one little boy who had 5 rolls and 2 fish for his lunch!
* Maybe they were expecting a lifeboat!?

Stevie told us the story this week of the lady that was stranded on the roof of her house by a flood. Soon a man in a rowing boat came by but she refused to get in, insisting that God was going to save her.

Then a motorboat came past and again she refused the help, explaining she had faith that God was going to rescue her.

Finally a helicopter came and shouted for her to grab hold of the rope. But she wouldn’t, believing that God would come.

Soon the waters rose and the lady drowned. When she met God in heaven, the first thing she asked was ‘why didn’t you save me?’ To which God answered, I sent a rowing boat, a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you want?

**Q = Why did the disciples, Jesus closest friends not recognise Jesus when he came to rescue them?**

V 26 says “they were terrified” and “cried out in fear”

A = Jesus didn’t look any different, but they didn’t recognise him because they were too consumed by their fear

**Lesson 3 = FEAR blocks out FAITH and blinds us to who God is**

**In difficult circumstances, if we let fear, anxiety and worry overwhelm us…… we won’t be able to see where Jesus is working on our behalf.**

So, how does God want us to respond whilst we are in the difficult circumstances?

Read v 27

1. **Take courage – the way out always starts with putting trust in God again**

In Psalm 23 that I referred to at the beginning it says “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

God promises many, many times in the scriptures that He will never leave you nor forsake you. Never!

And the Bible is absolutely full of account after account (Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, Daniel) where God showed up and rescued those that kept trusting in Him

I said at the beginning that I would come back to the ‘why’ God allows us to go through such difficult circumstances, even leads us through them

* Often our reactions to difficulty reveal that we don’t actually have our trust in God at all, it’s often in our own abilities, or in money or some other security
* And when things go wrong or out of our control, it forces us to own up to where our trust really lies – God doesn’t want his children putting their trust in the global economy or their job or some counselling theory – he’s a jealous God and he wants us to trust in Him!

v 27 again “But Jesus immediately said to them “take courage, it is I”

1. **“It is I”**

Do you know who your God is?

Have you proved Him faithful?

I know in my own life, that the darkest times are the times I value now (I have found that there’s a preciousness that comes out of suffering) because those are the times that God proved His faithfulness to me beyond any shadow of a doubt

For the disciples, Jesus was the one who:

* the day before fed 5,000 men plus women and children with 5 bread rolls and 2 fish
* and the day after – healed every sick person in that whole region, just by them touching his cloak

Jesus knew what he was doing setting this difficult situation up immediately after one of the most famous miracles he ever did!

v 27 again “But Jesus immediately said to them “take courage, it is I, don’t be afraid”

1. **“Don’t be afraid” – choose to move from fear to trust even before your circumstances change**

And that’s what Peter did!

His situation hadn’t changed, he just decides to stop being terrified and trust Jesus – not with something small like invited Jesus on to the boat with them but with something absolutely impossible!

v 28 “Lord if it is you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water”

Jesus must have been absolutely made up with that response!!

v 29 ‘come’ he said

“Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus”

God loves faith, no matter how tiny it might be, he responds to it.

Read v 30 & 31.

Peter began to sink when he took his eyes off Jesus and focussed again on the difficult circumstances (which still hadn’t changed at this point)

But you know what?

Jesus knew how much he could handle, he rescued him immediately and didn’t chastise him, I just hear sadness in his words “why did you doubt me?”

Q = Do you doubt God’s love for you?

Q = Do you doubt his ability to miraculously intervene in your life?

A = We doubt, when we take our eyes off Jesus and focus on our circumstances and become afraid again.

**Conclusion**

Read v 32-33

Jesus Christ is the Son of God - who loves you and gave his life so you and I could have an incredible personal relationship with the God who made the universe, our Heavenly Father.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus afresh today, and trust Him to complete the work that He began in us.

Amen.