

It may come as a bit of surprise to you, but the one thing which brings me the greatest satisfaction and enjoyment on a Sunday, is not the delicious meal that I know Jane will prepare for me, even when it is accompanied by a glass or three of my favourite wine, but the occasions when our service simply comes together perfectly as one whole, seamless, harmonious time of worship. And today is just such a day.

And that as usual is due entirely to Rev Jon's breadth of understanding the synergy between the liturgy, music, and readings. So, thank you Jon for not only making my day, but also for giving me this opportunity to share my enjoyment with everyone.

When I sat down to consider what to say, I felt an immediate empathy with both Elijah and Peter as they, in their different ways, embrace their fear and put their trust in God. Firstly, we have Elijah. He is suffering from deep burnout, at the end of his tether to the point where he's ready to choose death over life. He feels a complete failure and totally alone as the last surviving prophet in Israel.

God responds with patience, meeting his physical needs and coming to him in a quiet whisper, assuring Elijah that he is not alone because there are in fact 7,000 faithful people still remaining in Israel.

This is interesting because the wind, earthquake, and fire were the traditionally understood awesome signs of divine power. Yet by speaking as a still small voice of calm God shows us and Elijah that he is not contained by – or - active solely within those violent forces. Rather God shows that he can and does work through listening and responding with quiet compassion and comfort. His presence brings peace and calm after deep fear and sadness. And of course, this quiet moment enables Elijah to have a fresh start and new work to do.

In total contrast, a panic-stricken Peter in urgent fear of his life experiences God's presence in the form of Jesus arriving amidst a stormy sea to enact a powerful, physical rescue which also brings an immediate calm and peace to the other fearful disciples. These really are two very interesting and contrasting stories. Elijah was discouraged and lost seeking shelter in a quiet mountain cave, whilst Peter, being....well.... Peter, is out of the boat walking on water towards Jesus.

And for a moment things seem to be going very well indeed, that is, until he looks around seeing the storm and suddenly the water underneath his feet really does begin to feel like water and he begins to sink. At that moment life for him, like Elijah, is totally overwhelming. In desperation he cries out 'Lord, save me!' and discovers, like Elijah, that God is there for him.

Remember that both Peter and Elijah had seen God at work in dramatic ways in their recent pasts – Elijah when he challenged and defeated 450 prophets of the false god Baal to a contest by fire to prove that his Lord is the one true God and Peter who had just seen Jesus hours earlier miraculously feed 5,000 people.

I find it a comfort that such biblical heroes were neither faultless nor invulnerable and just like them I too have to learn at times to sometimes stand still and trust the quiet voice of God and at other times to cry out like Peter: 'Lord, save me!'

And as we all know, Jesus stretches out his hand towards his drowning disciple and brings him to the safety of the boat. And it is interesting to note how the other disciples respond. Having witnessed Jesus saving Peter, they immediately acknowledge him as the son of God and bow down to worship him.

What's more, we also know that Peter will fail again, most noticeably when standing by the brazier in Caiaphas's courtyard yet neither of these failures prevent Jesus from entrusting Peter with the leadership of the fledgling Christian community.

I get great encouragement from this, that 'little faith', doubts, and fears do not prevent God from carrying out his purposes through a fragile human being like me and through many of you too.

One of Jane's faith heroes is John Wimber and she often quotes his famous saying that 'Faith is spelt R.I.S.K.' Given our theme and readings today I think faith can also be spelt T.R.U.S.T. because for me, trust best describes how belief works in real life - faith being a noun of inner belief whilst trust is the active choice to rely on it, yet in practice they mean the same thing.

Regardless of who we are and whatever our experience of life, we too need to take the risk and place our confidence and trust, not in ourselves or others, but in the love of God who reaches out to us. Like Elijah and Peter, we need to simply trust him. To trust that he will be there for us at all times and trust that his loving presence will provide the strength that we need for each day.

And in a few minutes when we come to communion, I intend to release any burden I might be carrying by handing it over to God and I would like to invite you to join me and as we eat the food and drink the wine that God has provided let's listen out for that still small voice of calm saying to each and every one of us "I love you, trust in me".

Amen

Revd. Terry Ward-Hall, 9 Aug 2026