

## 19 OT Year A Readings and Commentary

**Summary by Dave Pitt:** Matthew describes the miracle of Jesus calming the storm in today's Gospel, along with the miracle of Jesus and Peter walking on the water. This passage is often read in a rational, scientific, light: Jesus merely appeared to be walking on the water, but was actually walking where the water wasn't deep. To paraphrase scripture scholar Raymond Brown, it is this type of explanation that is shallow, not the water on which Jesus walked. To focus on the possibility of these miracles is to miss their importance. Similarly, however, to treat these miracles simply as demonstrations of Jesus' power is to minimize their significance. Instead, we need to look to their importance to the Gospel narrative.

In the first place, within the context of the first reading, we can see how Jesus is revealed as God. In 1 Kings, God is shown as a whispering sound amidst the power of nature. In today's Gospel Jesus uses classic Old Testament language ("It is I") to make himself known in the midst of a storm. Thus, we know God in the person of Christ. Second, Matthew uses this event to indicate the role of faith. Peter shares in the power of Christ as long as his faith remains strong. When, however, the "littleness" becomes apparent, Peter begins to drown. Peter is a consolation to us, for our own faith is often small like his. And yet, we find hope in knowing that Christ will save us when we call out despite the size of our faith, saving us just as he saved Peter.

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### Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer

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rational, scientific, light: Jesus merely appeared to be walking on the water but was actually walking where the water wasn't deep. To paraphrase scripture scholar Raymond Brown, it is this type of explanation that is shallow, not the water on which Jesus walked. To focus on the possibility of these miracles is to miss their importance. Similarly, however, to treat these miracles simply as demonstrations of Jesus' power is to minimize their significance. Instead, we need to look to their importance to the Gospel narrative. In the first place, within the context of the first reading, we can see how Jesus is revealed as God. In 1 Kings, God is shown as a whispering sound amidst the power of nature. In today's Gospel Jesus uses classic Old Testament language ("It is I") to make himself known in the midst of a storm. Thus, we know God in the person of Christ. Second, Matthew uses this event to indicate the role of faith. Peter shares in the power of Christ as long as his faith remains strong. When, however, the "littleness" becomes apparent, Peter begins to drown. Peter is a consolation to us, for our own faith is often small like his. And yet, we find hope in knowing that Christ will save us when we call out despite the size of our faith, saving us just as he saved Peter.

**First Reading** 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

*Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord.*

**A reading from the first Book of Kings**

At the mountain of God, Horeb,

Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter.

Then the LORD said to him,

"Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD;  
the LORD will be passing by."

A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains  
and crushing rocks before the LORD—  
but the LORD was not in the wind.

After the wind there was an earthquake—  
but the LORD was not in the earthquake.  
After the earthquake there was fire—  
but the LORD was not in the fire.  
After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound.  
When he heard this,  
Elijah hid his face in his cloak  
and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

## **The word of the Lord**

**Commentary: 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a by John Paul Heil:**

Main Theme: God calls us to persevere in our prophetic mission.

The prophet Elijah has fled from those trying to kill him, but paradoxically prays to die and seems then to have abandoned his prophetic calling. His flight, however, amounts to a pilgrimage to a sacred place--"the mountain of God, Horeb." This is the same place where Moses encountered God in a dramatic theophany. A "theophany" describes a coming of God recognized by the terrifying circumstances that accompany it, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, storms, thunder, lightning, fire, etc, rather than by seeing the actual figure of God.

After Elijah took shelter in a cave, God commands him, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord." God is thus calling Elijah to re-commit himself to his prophetic mission of speaking the word of God. But despite various characteristics of a theophany--"a strong and heavy wind," "an earthquake," and "fire," God is not present in these terrifying phenomena. Rather, Elijah experiences the presence of God as "a tiny whispering sound." As Moses once hid his face from the presence of God, so Elijah "hid his face in his cloak." He is now ready to listen to God in the whispering sound and thus re-commit himself to his prophetic mission. When we are ready to give up our

prophetic mission, God is there to gently empower us to persevere.

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## **Responsorial Psalm** Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14

**R(8)** Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;  
the LORD—for he proclaims peace.  
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,  
glory dwelling in our land.

Kindness and truth shall meet;  
justice and peace shall kiss.  
Truth shall spring out of the earth,  
and justice shall look down from heaven.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;  
our land shall yield its increase.  
Justice shall walk before him,  
and prepare the way of his steps.

Commentary: **Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14** by John Paul  
**Heil**: Main Theme: PEACE and JUSTICE complement one another as gifts of God.

The psalmist informs us of what he hears God proclaiming, namely, peace. The biblical concept of “peace” (shalom in

Hebrew) carries much richer connotations than the way that we often use the term "peace" today. For us peace is frequently a mainly negative concept--the absence of war or conflict. The biblical concept of peace is much more positive. It expresses an overall experience of complete well-being and harmony that exists in one's relationship both with God and one's fellow human being. Peace thus means being rightly and justly related to God and one another. While we must ardently strive for such peace, it is ultimately a gift of God that is complemented by the gift of justice. There can be no peace without justice for all. This complementarity is indicated in our psalm by the beautiful expression, "justice and peace shall kiss." The psalmist expresses our future hope that "truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven" as gifts of God. Indeed, it is God himself who "will give his benefits" and so "justice shall walk before him." If we want peace, we must work for social justice for all peoples, both of which are ultimately gifts of God that we join the psalmist in hoping and praying for.

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## **Second Reading** Romans 9:1-5

*I could wish that I were accursed for the sake of my own people.*

## **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans**

Brothers and sisters:

I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie;

my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing me witness

that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ

for the sake of my own people,

my kindred according to the flesh.  
They are Israelites;  
theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants,  
the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;  
theirs the patriarchs, and from them,  
according to the flesh, is the Christ,  
who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

## **The word of the Lord**

**Commentary: Romans 9:1-5 by Virginia Smith:** Paul's writings have sometimes been charged with possessing an anti-Jewish bias. This seems strange given his extraordinary education at the feet of the renowned rabbinical teacher, Gamaliel, (See Acts 22:1-5) and his pride in his background as a Pharisee. Today's reading certainly clears up any doubts as to Paul's loyalty to and fondness for his people, so much so that some scholars have wondered if this passage is genuinely Pauline. Granted, Paul's missions was primarily to the Gentiles, but is that any reason to assume he no longer cared about the Jews? Quite the contrary as these lines open a discussion covering a full three chapters on how or whether justification through Christ is reconcilable with God's promises to Israel. By the end of it, the reader empathizes with Paul in his deeply emotional zeal to have God's Chosen People accept the fullness of the promise brought by Jesus.

Of the many messages that could be extracted here, two stand out. One: anti-Semitism is totally at odds with Christian thought. The Jews are the spiritual 'grandparents' of Christian belief and practice, and we owe them a great debt. As a practicing Jew himself, Jesus would be appalled at the bloody history involving Jews and Christians. Second: as some Jews had a hard time accepting, there is always room for change in our relationship with the God beyond the universe who is ever the same, yet ever new. If we become too set in our ways, too self-assured that our path home to

God is the only one, we may miss the excitement and challenge posed by a slight variance of direction. If we do, Paul will be justifiably be concerned about us.

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## **Gospel Acclamation**

Psalm 130:5      Alleluia, alleluia.

I wait for the Lord;  
my soul waits for his word.

## **Gospel Matthew 14:22-33**

*Command me to come to you on the water.*

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew**

After he had fed the people, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat

and precede him to the other side,  
while he dismissed the crowds.

After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

When it was evening he was there alone.

Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore,  
was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night,  
he came toward them walking on the sea.

When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified.

"It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear.

At once Jesus spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter said to him in reply,

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

He said, "Come."

Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus.

But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened;

and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter,

and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

After they got into the boat, the wind died down.

Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying,

"Truly, you are the Son of God."

## **The Gospel of the Lord**

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**Commentary: Matthew 14:22-33 by Virginia Smith:** In our systematic journey through the first Gospel this year, we have now arrived at a point between the third and fourth sermons. Both narrative and dialogue characterize this section, and topics tend to center on Christology and ecclesiology. Today, it's Christology, the nature of the God-man.

The incidence of Jesus' walking on the water is recorded in every Gospel except Luke's, but with quite different emphases. In both Mark and Matthew, the apostles think they're seeing a ghost. In Mark, Jesus simply climbs into the boat, and the Twelve fail to 'get it' (Mark generally takes a dim view of that group). Only Matthew chronicles Peter's ill-fated attempt to join Jesus for a stroll on the waves. This is in keeping with Matthew's portrayal of Peter as a major

character in his gospel. Peter's impetuosity, the inadequacy of his faith as demonstrated here, and Jesus' special care of him are all highlighted in Matthew. In John, this event is used as the lead-in to his monumental Bread of Life discourse, possibly to exhibit that the same powers that allow Jesus to walk on water can be employed just as easily to institute the Eucharist.

This is an outstanding example of how the same material is utilized in rather dissimilar ways in the various Gospels. It is also an illustration of why so many of us relate to the bumbling Peter who grows to become Christianity's first universal leader. We, too, can and will mature in faith if only we are patient and if we are humble enough to ask for help walking on the waters of our own life. With such faith, we will not sink.