

## Judges 6

<sup>11</sup> The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

<sup>13</sup> "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

<sup>14</sup> The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

<sup>15</sup> "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

<sup>16</sup> The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

## Matthew 14:22

### Jesus Walks on the Water

<sup>22</sup> Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a

considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

<sup>25</sup> Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. <sup>26</sup> When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

<sup>28</sup> "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup> "Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

<sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

<sup>32</sup> And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. <sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

*Based on the prayer of St. Patrick, used as a reflection  
after the talk.*

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me and before me.  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in hearts of all who know me.  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger,  
Christ in quiet and in roar.

Love, blessed Trinity of three,  
Bound in unity  
Who guides my journey.  
I will arise with strength of heaven  
Trusting in Your light  
To guide my journey  
Shine before me  
Lead me home.

Power to guide me, might to hold me,  
Wisdom teach me, watching o'er me.  
Ear to hear me, hand to guard me,  
Love to conquer every fear.

*Song. Courage V1 and V2 and part of the refrain.*

Worry seems to know my every move;  
With every new imagining  
He whispers in my ear.  
Even when I've nothing left to prove,  
He's painting possibilities  
Of failure and despair.

Wonder if I'm ever really here;  
Retreating to the fantasies  
Of what my life could be.  
Captive to the highwayman of fear,  
He's robbing me of everything  
That's right in front of me.

So God, I'll stand with open hands  
And heart just fixed on following.  
I'll keep my eyes on this day's prize  
Of finding You in everything.  
Courage to take one step at a time;  
Today is my gift, not tomorrow.  
Courage to walk with Christ in my sight  
The path strewn with laughter and sorrow.

Our scriptures give us two contrasting stories and both have fear as a central component.

One is the fear that arises from nowhere, fear as a reaction to a situation. The other is living with fear as a constant companion.

The antidote to both is exactly the same.

St. Peter and the other disciples quite naturally experience fear as a figure approaches them walking on water. So would you and so would I. Something so abnormal would have us in a right panic.

Fear has a purpose. To fight or to flee, to defend yourself or protect yourself. It's a survival mechanism.

If it's below freezing and the road is icy and I have to drive somewhere Fear says "that looks dangerous" and I say thank you I can see that for myself but I'm going anyway and I shall drive cautiously.

Jesus seeks to calm the disciples fears but Peter still isn't convinced and so a request is made and Peter climbs from the boat and for a while walks on water.

If only the story stopped at verse 29. Peter walks on water towards Jesus.

But in verse 30 he looks away from Jesus to the wind and waves and he starts to sink. Crying out he is rescued.

We'll come back to Peter and the Disciples later.

Gideon lives in a time of trouble. His country is frequently invaded by warriors from the neighbouring country of Midian, crops are stolen, livestock is stolen, people are taken for slavery and worse.

We can't criticise Gideon for living fearfully. It would be like saying to someone in Gaza "why are you afraid?"

But Gideon's fear has gone beyond being a response to the situation. Fear is a constant companion; in fact he's internalised fear.

I want you to imagine that Fear is a person and Fear is always nearby.

Just about every moment possible Fear is speaking fearful things to you. And the thing is, you listen. And you listen because fear *isn't always wrong*.

Much as you would like Fear to only visit very occasionally he's gone and taken up residence. And you listen.

In fact you listen so carefully and diligently, that Fear can take a holiday and go and bother someone else and you say to yourself all the things Fear would say if he were nearby. This is where Gideon has got to.

Gideon knows the history of his people and how God has saved them in the past, where is God now?

The angel of the Lord says to Gideon – "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

What is this heavenly being talking about? Has he not understood how desperate the situation is? Does he not know who Gideon is? The least in a family of the weakest clan in Manasseh?

What Gideon doesn't say out loud is "I'm scared. I'm afraid. I'm afraid of my own people and what they would think let alone the Midianites. Gideon lives with fear.



I found this image which is trying to convey what I'm saying to you – BUT – it's wrong. Fear doesn't look scary, far from it. Fear likes to look reasonable and insightful and genuinely concerned for you and isn't always wrong. "Don't stand on that banana skin" is good advice.

But Fear isn't content just to warn you about banana skins. Fear wants to control your whole life.

I think my favourite hymn writer knows this only too well. On the album Courage and in the song Courage he writes this.

V1 Worry seems to know my every move;  
With every new imagining

He whispers in my ear.  
Even when I've nothing left to prove,  
He's painting possibilities  
Of failure and despair.

V2 Wonder if I'm ever really here;  
Retreating to the fantasies  
Of what my life could be.  
*Captive to the highwayman of fear,  
He's robbing me of everything  
That's right in front of me.*

One way out is to live a fantasy life, dreaming yourself into a happy place and trying to ignore real life because Fear has made real life so fearful.

Jesus could see that the very wet St. Peter would one day become the leader of the Apostles and the church.

The Angel of the Lord called the trembly fearful Gideon a mighty warrior.

All of us who have spent far too much of our lives with Fear, or Anxiety, or Worry or Concern might like to know God sees who we truly are and truly can be. We can be set free.

We have to put Fear in its place.

Fear cannot be banished and it would be foolish to do so. When fear promoted my Mother to grab me back out of the road just before a lorry thundered past it served a purpose.

But to live constantly in fear can only be resolved one way and St. John has the answer.

1 John 4:18 perfect love drives out fear. The context for him speaking this way is that God is love and living in God is living in love and banishing the fear of punishment. Perfect love drives out fear.

But it's equally true for what I've been saying to all who live fearfully and anxiously. Perfect love isn't a formula. Perfect love is a person.

The more we let Jesus be the person nearby, the less fear can be speaking all the time, indeed fear will eventually resume its rightful place, banana skins, icy roads, and climbing long ladders with no-one holding the base.

Jesus is perfect love and only practising his presence will finally push fear where it needs to be.

My hymn writer knew this too and so did St. Patrick.

We are going to have a time of reflection with these words.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me and before me.  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in hearts of all who know me.  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger,  
Christ in quiet and in roar.

Love, blessed Trinity of three,  
Bound in unity  
Who guides my journey.  
I will arise with strength of heaven

Trusting in Your light  
To guide my journey  
Shine before me  
Lead me home.

**Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 3 August 2025**