

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 9 August 2020

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life! Help us now to hear and obey what you say to us today. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

In the name of the Lord

Anyone who is not in the faith of Christ hears a story titled 'Jesus walks on the water' in Matthew 14:22-33, can be sceptical and wonders if such an event indeed happened. If it is the case, the person is missing a crucial point. That is, scripture was primarily written for the community of faith - the church. Scripture consistently speaks to the church about who God is, and what God is doing in the world and beyond - nothing more or less. While preparing this sermon, I was overwhelmed by the weight of the message from both readings. It is not possible to discuss both readings in-depth in 15 minute - sermon. Today we'll focus on only one thing - the name of the Lord. In Jesus' time, people's names were not only labels, but they show us who they were as a whole. Jesus' name was no exception. Apart from the name Jesus,¹ two names or titles are used throughout the New Testament. One is Jesus' words to address who he is - '*I am*', and the other is '*the Lord*' called by the disciples. We'll explore these two through accounts of the disciples in Matthew, Paul in Romans, and lastly through our faith journey in the name of the Lord.

1. *The name of the Lord in Matthew 14:22-33*

The disciples are many stadia² from the land, and the boat is being beaten - or, more literally, being tormented³ - by the waves. The situation reminds us of Jesus' calming of the sea in Matthew 8:23-27. In that story, Jesus led the disciples into the boat and stayed with them, even though he was asleep. When the storm arose, and the waves covered the boat, the disciples cried out, "Lord, save us; we are perishing."⁴ Jesus questions, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then, he rebukes the wind, and the story ends with the disciples marvelling, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?"⁵

In contrast, in the 14:22-33, there is again wind and waves, but no storm and the disciples are not fearing for their lives. What does cause them to be afraid of is seeing someone walking on the water and thinking it's a ghost. Jesus assures them that it is him by saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."⁶ Jesus reveals himself - not simply as Jesus, their teacher, but as "I AM." A more literal translation of this sentence would be, "Take heart, *I am*, do not be afraid." This self-revelation is a disclosure of Jesus' source of power. For Matthew's Jewish Christian readers, 'I am' means the name of God.

'I am' as the name of God first appears in Exodus 3:14. When Moses encounters God at the burning bush, Moses asks what he is to say to the Israelites when they ask what God has sent him to them, and YHWH replies, 'I am who I am', adding, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'⁷ But, the tetragrammaton - YHWH in Hebrew would not be pronounced since it was too sacred. Another notable example of 'I am' appears in John 18. Jesus' captors come with the latest night-fighting equipment,

¹ Matthew 1:21 – "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." The Greek form of the Hebrew name [Yeshua](#) or **Y'shua** (Hebrew: ישוע) means 'to deliver' 'to rescue.'

² Stadium (plural **stadia**) is an ancient Roman or Greek measure of length, about 185 metres (originally the length of a stadium).

³ Βασανίζω – to torment, torture

⁴ Matthew 8:25

⁵ Matthew 8:27

⁶ Matthew 14:27: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." ' θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε.

⁷ Exodus 3:14: God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'"
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהַיְתָה אֲנִי אֲהַיְתָה וַיֹּאמֶר בְּהַתְּאֵמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהַיְתָה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

including lanterns, torches, and weapons. Yet in this encounter Jesus overpowers these agents of the world with the name of God. He repeatedly tells them “I am” (18:5, 6, 8). Although some translations paraphrase this to read “I am he,” there are only two words in Greek: “*ego eimi*” or “I am,” which recall the traditional name of God (Exodus 3:14).

Jesus’ self-revelation is not only through his words, but his actions, too. In Job 9:8, God alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea. Similar examples can be found in Psalm 89:9.⁸ In the midst of the sea’s churning, Jesus does what only God can do as a visible manifestation of Godhead, and it’s why believers called him ‘the Lord.’

2. ***The name of the Lord in Romans 10:5-15***

In Romans 10:9, Paul says, “because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Letters of Paul are considered as the earliest record in Christianity, and they provide an insight and foundational texts for both Christian theology and ethics.⁹ Paul’s use of ‘the Lord’¹⁰ to address Jesus shows his faith in Christ Jesus. For Paul, among many gods and many lords, there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ “through who are all things and through whom we exist.”¹¹ For him, calling on the name of the Lord is crucial for anyone to be saved.¹² It is because Jesus was raised from death and his name only has the power to save. Paul’s faith allows us to see what the early church may have experienced through Easter. Calling on the name of the Lord enables us to live in the same experience that the early church had experienced, and it directs us to the goal of faith.

3. ***Our faith journey in the name of the Lord***

In Romans 10:9, Paul says how our faith life is defined and directs us to the goal of the faith in Christ. It reads: “because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” These can be summarized in the cross-bearing life and *agape* (love). That is, salvation begins from one’s self-denial while receiving Jesus as our saviour – the Lord. Once our lives are reigned by the Lord, everything that happens in our faith lives is redefined and reconfigured by the Lord. Here is what makes different Christianity from other religions. This faith began from above, not below, and it means that one must deny one’s self and take up the cross to follow Jesus. We often hear that God is love from people who may practise different spiritual disciplines. In Christianity, love (*agape*) was revealed solely on the cross when God was silent to the cry of Jesus – ‘my God, my God why have you forsaken me?’¹³ It may make others perplexed. Yet the total silence from God had enabled Jesus to finish his work - to obey the Father’s will till the end. In doing so, sin was cancelled and death defeated. As such, whenever we hear the word ‘love’ or ‘God is love,’ we cannot help but remember the cross and the crucified Lord, as love (*agape*) and the cross are inseparable.¹⁴ Jesus says, “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹⁵ Whenever we call on the Lord, it always reminds us of that the cross-bearing life and the new commandment - love one another go together. May God help us understand it and help our unbelief. Amen.

⁸ The psalmist exalts the Lord, “You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.”

⁹ Among 14 letters, only seven letters are considered as Paul’s - 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippian, Philemon, 1 and 2 Corinthians. These letters were most likely written during the height of Paul’s missionary activity, between 50 and 58 a.d., making them the earliest surviving Christian documents—they predate the earliest of the Gospels, Mark, by at least ten years.

¹⁰ κύριος, ου, ὁ kyrios owner, master, lord; Lord

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 8:6: ἄλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ.

¹² Romans 10:13

¹³ Matthew 27:46

¹⁴ Jesus says, “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

¹⁵ John 15:13