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There is this story about a man who, while out rock climbing, lost his footing and found himself desperately holding on to a protruding branch. In his desperation he cried out to God for help. To his amazement God answered and said: 'Do you believe in me'? 'I do, I do,' replied the man 'without a shadow of doubt.' But God said, 'do you really, really believe in me', to which the desperate man replied 'yes, yes there is nothing more certain'. 'Okay,' God said, 'let go.' To which the man screamed: 'you can't be serious - is there anyone else up there.'

People can be plagued by all sorts of fears whether real or imaginary. They say that the words 'do not be afraid' occur 365 times in the bible, once for every day of the year. Medics tell us that anxiety and stress lowers our immune system so we are more susceptible to bodily diseases – even Covid19. It also means we struggle to get close to anyone. A Moorish proverb puts it like this: 'he who fears someone or some situation gives it power over him'.

The positive side of fear, however, is that it prevents us from doing reckless things putting our lives at risk. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'.

But there is a more insidious fear which means we lack the nerve to really take charge of our own lives and be our own person. Inadvertently, we may let other people move in and take over our lives. I've just been reading this week that people who are victims of modern slavery may not be fully aware that they are being controlled, and that's the problem. The same could be happening to us in our day to day relationships. It happens in marriage more than you think. One of the danger signs is if we're always guarded in what we say or wary of

receiving a hostile retort. We daren't do things differently. We're scared of stepping out of line – scared we won't get the nod of approval. Nowadays we can even be muzzled by political correctness. We become like the man in the gospel who when he had received the one talent out of fear hid it in the ground.

As in the case of Peter, Jesus will sometimes invite us to step on to choppy waters to prove that we have faith in Him. But we must keep our eyes fixed on Him or else we might end up in difficulty, like Peter. Jesus said to Peter when he began to sink, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt'. But even in our anxious moments his outstretched hand is there to rescue us. But do we resolutely reach out and grab his hand or let the situation get the better of us and sink.

Jesus came to save us from anything which obstructs our growth as persons. Fear or anxiety is one of those things. The Evil One aims to keep us restricted and controlled so that we never grow into the person which God wants us to be. But like Peter, Jesus beckons us to walk on the water with him and enjoy true freedom as a child of God.