

Matthew 14:22-33

Aim of lesson

To show that God is always willing to help us if we put our trust in him.

Background study

Study the main geographical features of the Sea of Galilee.

Suggested outline of lesson

Jesus refreshed by prayer

Begin this lesson by telling the children that the incident related followed immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, which you may need to summarise for them if they do not know about it. Although Jesus was tired, he chose to spend the night in prayer. Sleep clears away our tiredness, and prayer did the same for Jesus, making him fresh and strong and ready to carry on the work of God. Jesus went up on to the hillside alone and stayed there throughout the hours of darkness.

The storm

The suddenness of the storm was a typical feature of the Sea of Galilee, which is seven miles wide at its widest point. The disciples were half-way across. It had taken many hours to get this far because the wind was blowing strongly against them and the sea was very rough.

....not tempted beyond that which we can bear . .

On the land, Jesus could see them, but at first took no action to save them - knowing that they were safer than they knew. The night passed, and it was the fourth watch (3 a.m. - 6 a.m.) before he left his prayers. The disciples were almost at the point of exhaustion when Jesus finally approached them, walking on the water. Imagine their state of mind as they became aware of this ethereal figure in the half-light of early dawn. They cried out in fear. Immediately Jesus reassured them with the words: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear".

Relevance to the children's lives

What does this story tell us about our struggles to cope with things that seem impossible? Have you ever said: "I can't do it"? (Suggest such situations as apologizing, owning up after doing something wrong, getting out of bed in the dark, etc.) If we remember that Jesus is there, too, we will be able to say: "I know I can!"

The disciples react to Jesus

It was hard for the disciples to grasp the reality of the situation, but Peter reacted with his customary impetuosity. His initial act of faith and courage, encouraged by Jesus, should not be underestimated, even though he did not wholly succeed. He did not falter until

he took his eyes off Jesus and, on seeing the dark, surging waves around him, allowed his own fears to crowd out his faith. Having begun to sink, he reached instinctively towards Jesus again rather than back to the boat. Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and saved him. Peter had some faith: he had the right idea. Inspired by Jesus, he could dare to attempt the seemingly impossible. When he began to doubt, he had only to seek the help of Jesus and the impossible could be achieved again. Jesus' words to Peter contained a rebuke, implying that Peter should have known by then that he could put his entire trust in him.

Jesus brings calm

As soon as Jesus and Peter got into the ship, the wind ceased; the storm subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. Their awareness of the presence of Jesus inspired a feeling of calmness to the situation and to their own hearts. The effect of the incident upon the disciples was to reinforce their belief that Jesus was the Son of God, for only with God's power could Jesus have walked on the turbulent water, and upheld his faltering disciple.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, sometimes we have to do things that we find hard or frightening. Please help us to remember that we can turn to you and to Jesus and rely on you to help us. Amen.

Memory verse

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).