14th September 2026

Sinking

"He sinks because he's a human and not a duck!"

Rev Robin Allison, *From a Sunday Sermon*

I want to make it clear that I have permission from my minister, Rev Robin Allison, to use the quotation above. I'm sharing it today because it had a big impact on me, but also because it highlights an important theological issue. The quote is from a recent sermon on Jesus walking on the water. Peter, inspired by this, gets out of the boat and walks on the water too – at least for a step or two before he begins to sink. But he's rescued from a watery grave by the outstretched hand of Jesus. The full quotation is this:

[Peter] sinks because he sinks. He sinks because he's a human and not a duck. He's foolhardy, impulsive, and, as we soon discover, he's also very, very afraid.

In my hospice, I worked with a deeply Christian lady: church on a Sunday; pastoral visitor; worship leader; secretary of the church Guild; all-round good person. She had a debilitating paralysis caused by a tumour on her spine, and she was struggling – big time. "If I had more faith," she said, "this wouldn't be happening." "I must have displeased God in some way." "If my prayers were more sincere, I would be healed." "God is good, Jesus is my Saviour, so the fault must be with *me*." No conversations with me or anyone else made any difference. She died in some distress.

But she was in difficulty, not because of a measurement of her faith, but because she was human. A victim of years of bad teaching, a reinforcing of iffy theology, a misunderstanding of the Gospel message – or a combination of all three? Who knows? But it was as if a deal had been made with God: I'll live an exemplary Christian life, and You will keep me from harm. And God seemed to have broken that side of the bargain. But would God do that? No! So, it must be her fault. She was a Peter, thinking she could walk on water, and beating herself up because she couldn't. But in truth, she was a Peter who was sinking *because she's a human and not a duck.* She was real. She was afraid. She was as she was made to be.

To sink isn't the anthesis of faith. To sink doesn't mean it's your fault. To sink is normal. To sink is human. To sink is about *not* being a duck. All the faith in the world isn't going to stop you from sinking. It's a hand being held out to keep you afloat that will do that!

A prayer for today

Walking on water isn't for me. I've tried, but it doesn't work. Thank God for a rescuing hand.

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