Like every Christian church, the chief characteristic of this cathedral is its focus on Jesus Christ and the transforming impact which God intends him to have on our lives and, through us, on the world around us. This building, together with everything we do in it, exists in order to help us discover Jesus Christ. And so to be gloriously infected with the ability to believe, to declare, to live out everything which is summed up by the three words ‘Jesus is Lord’.

To say that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to affirm that Jesus has overcome everything that holds me back from being the child of God I was created to be, that because of Jesus I am ‘ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven’.

To say that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to assert that Jesus is, as it were, the managing director of the life I live now, that he is in charge, that he sets the priorities, that he watches over everything that happens to me.

To say that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to express confidence in the fact that, one day, every knee will bow before him and everything that is not as it should be will be put right.

Jesus is Lord. Quite a lot for three words to carry! But this is what it means.

The journey towards discovering that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is one that we find his followers taking in today’s Gospel reading. It’s when they see Jesus walking on the lake, saving Peter and calming the storm that they worship him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’ - a vital step along the road that was to lead them to the affirmation which they were later ready to live for and content to die for - that ‘Jesus is Lord’.

As we gather for this act of worship here this morning - what is it that leads us to follow their example? Or, if Christian commitment is something we’re still exploring, what would it take for us to follow their example? How do people reach the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God? What is it that, to echo Paul in Romans chapter 10, leads us to ‘confess with [our] lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in [our] hearts that God raised him from the dead’ and so be saved?

Paul’s answer comes in the four questions he asks here in verses 14-15. Four questions which highlight the chain of events which results in us acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and receiving God’s gift of salvation.

We begin, as Paul does, with the final step in the sequence: ‘how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?’

It’s really important to be clear about this. For, as Peter found while sinking into the lake, salvation is not automatic. It wasn’t until he shouted for help - which we can imagine he did pretty quickly! - that Jesus reached out and rescued him. The fact is that the radical change involved in living out the truth that ‘Jesus is Lord’ means that our consent is required.

Salvation is freely available but no-one is forced to accept it. Paul is very clear here in verse 12 that everyone may receive salvation, everyone may call on God and be rescued: ‘For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all...’ But that’s not where he ends. ‘...[he] is generous to all who call on
him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ Paul is not saying that ‘Everyone shall be saved’ but that ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’.

But the question remains - ‘how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?’ Back in Matthew 14, it was easy for the disciples on the boat, wasn’t it? They had plenty of evidence to go on - the evidence of their own eyes, no less! - as they knelt in the puddles on the deck and worshipped Jesus. The problem for us in trying to follow their example is that we can’t possibly join them. That sort of evidence is unavailable to us.

But the good news is that there’s no need for us to jostle with the disciples for space in the boat. There’s no need for us to have the kind of dramatic experiences which they had. As Jesus himself says to doubting Thomas towards the end of John’s Gospel, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’ Right from the start, Jesus has taken it for granted that his followers don’t have to see him in order to have faith in him.

So how can we believe without seeing? Paul’s second question points towards the answer: ‘And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?’

We’re often told that ‘seeing is believing’. But the truth is that, when it comes to putting our trust in Jesus Christ, ‘hearing is believing’. We don’t need to see him, which is just as well, because we can’t! But we can hear about him. And when it comes to being introduced to the wonder of who he is and what has done, this is just as powerful and effective.

As long as someone is doing the speaking! Which is what Paul comes to in his third question: ‘And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?’ The word Paul uses is of a herald in the marketplace, the town-crier of the ancient world. In order to communicate, whether from a platform or a pulpit, in discussion or in conversation, someone has to speak out. It’s true, of course, that God makes himself known in all sorts of other ways as well. But the specific details of the good news about Jesus have to be communicated by what people say.

Which brings Paul to his fourth question: ‘And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?’ One of the things about the good news about Jesus is that it isn’t always received as good news - to put it mildly! Here in Romans chapter 10 Paul expresses something of his frustration at the opposition he has received from his own people as he has tried to get the message across to them.

He isn’t alone. Throughout history and all around the world today, communicating the gospel is a struggle. Which is why those who proclaim it need to know that they’re not doing it off their own bat but as those who have been sent, commissioned to fulfil the final command of Jesus himself: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’

In the life of the church we have Evangelists with a capital ‘E’ who are particularly gifted in this area and make it their primary activity. But it isn’t just them. The rest of us, evangelists with a small ‘e’ if you like, are sent out as well. There’s a sense in which every Christian is sent out into the world as an ambassador for Jesus, every Christian is a messenger of the gospel, every Christian is to be someone who proclaims good news through what they say and how they live.

Let’s draw the threads together as we reflect on what these verses have to say.
For some of us, today brings the challenge to move from simply believing isolated facts about Jesus to the point where we actively entrust our lives to him by calling on the name of the Lord to be saved. To come to the point where we are ready to say, not just ‘Jesus is Lord’ but ‘Jesus is my Lord’.

For others of us, today brings the challenge to investigate further, to turn the glimpse we have caught of who Jesus might be to a careful examination of who he really is and what this means for how we live our lives today.

And for others of us, today brings the challenge to let our light shine that little bit more brightly, to be more open to the opportunities God lead us into for sensitively sharing our faith with others.

How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ Amen.