

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM
June 25, 2017

Mark 4:35-41 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." **36** Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. **37** A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. **38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

"From Fear to Faith"

He had a huge, imposing task. Taking the oath of office as president of the United States for the first time, in his first term, Franklin D. Roosevelt faced a crisis of epic proportions. In 1933 the economy was in shambles. Unemployment was at 25%. Worse than all the numbers though, people had given up hope. They saw no way out of the nation's extreme troubles.

So moments after taking that oath of office, with the nation in the grips of the Great Depression, the new president delivered his first inaugural address. That 20 minute speech is probably most famous for this line: "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."¹ Fear can freeze us in our tracks. Fear can immobilize us and prevent us from taking action. Fear of this kind can send us deeper into our troubles instead of pulling us out of the pit. So you can understand the president's desire to inspire citizens and give them a sense of confidence in his policies and move them to support his administration's work in spirit even if not in action.

But sometimes there are good reasons to fear. Nuclear weapons in the wrong hands. Drunk drivers on roads. Reports of layoffs and companies closing. Snakes. Those things are all real. Not everything that brings anxiety and concern is actually a bogeyman. So in those cases fear isn't just something in our heads. Sometimes the thing we have to fear is more than fear itself. For those actual issues, we need more than speeches, we need security. We need to do more than just convince ourselves the fear isn't real. We need to do more than make up our minds to not be so afraid. We need more than faith in ourselves, we need trust in something real and powerful. And that's what we get when we look to Jesus. With Jesus, we journey from fear to faith.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_inauguration_of_Franklin_D._Roosevelt

In this case, in Mark chapter four, the real source of fear was a “furious squall.” The beginning of this section tells us that this happened later in the day. In Mark 4:1 we learn how the day started: **“Jesus began to teach by the lake.”** The crowds grew so large and the people must have been pushing closer to hear that they were actually blocking out others farther back. So Jesus finds a practical solution. Jesus gets into a boat and teaches the people as they stand on the shore. Maybe it was a small cove or bay with hills sloping away from the water to form a natural amphitheater so they could all get a glimpse and a chance to hear.

But after a full day of teaching and meeting the demands of those crowds, Jesus decides to get away for a spell. He slips away in that boat and heads across the lake. Soon, he is fast asleep in the stern of the boat. That’s when the trouble starts. The Sea of Galilee is what we would consider a nice-sized lake. It is a teardrop shaped body of water in a sort of bowl with hills rising on all sides. The Jordan River meanders its way from mountains to enter the lake from the north and exits at an opening to the south until it ends its journey in the Dead Sea. In places those hills are gentle slopes. At others, cliffs box in the body of water. If you are in the middle of the lake and look out to the west, out toward the Mediterranean Sea, you would see a break in those cliffs. It’s here that vicious winds from the west would swoop down on the lake without warning and whip up the waves, hit the hillsides on the far end and swirl around over the water chaotically. And if you were one of 13 adult males inside a 25 foot fishing vessel as the winds rock your craft and waves come crashing over the sides, you would have good reason to be more than a little afraid. Your life would be in danger.

When you have real reasons for real fear, you’re not always sure what to do about it. Your emotions kick in. Panic sets in. But you do something. Or at least you know you need to do something. At those times, silence seems insensitive; doing nothing feels like not caring. There’s Jesus. Somehow still managing to stay asleep. Not noticing or not caring about the storm and the certain catastrophe awaiting the twelve most important people in his life.

When fear finds no relief, you get desperate. And when we don’t get relief from our trusted sources, we have to do something, find another alternative. You don’t want to be timid or cave in to cowardice. So you set our hearts on something else. When everyone else disappoints and lets you down, sometimes you feel like you can only rely on yourself. Fear pushes you further inside. You are the only one who can help you now. You have to take matters into your own hands. You have to come up with a plan b, you have to try something else, you have to do more.

Your fear might not be another terrorist attack or nuclear weapons in the hands of a madman. Your greatest anxieties might not be about jobs or houses or societal costs of substance abuse. You might fear not being loved, not feeling accepted, not being appreciated, not being able to provide the financial or emotional support your family needs. But wherever you turn besides Jesus, your fear will only consume you. The problem with the disciples on that lake wasn’t that they cried out with almost insulting accusations, it was that they turned to him as a last resort. They knew Jesus was special and helpful, but their

faith was incomplete. Every other option you turn to before Jesus and besides Jesus will never be able to deliver what you expect from them.

Your first step is recognizing that you have allowed other things to become our idols. Your failure to get results that you want and find relief from your fears have actually led you away from the God of all creation, the God of infinite power, might and love. The first step leads you to realize you have treated Jesus just like those disciples. You and I so often treated Jesus as someone special and helpful, but not our only relief for the very real fears in life. Our faith in ourselves has turned into an idolatrous failure to truly have faith in Jesus.

So what is really going on here? Why would Jesus get in a boat if he knows they will be greeted by hurricane force winds? Why does he let his disciples flounder with overwhelming anxiety? There must be a reason why Jesus waits so long before he wakes up, speaks, and acts.

You've probably heard people talk about a section of Scripture and respond, "I really feel God is saying something here." And it's hard to argue with people's feelings, isn't it? So someone might say, "I think God is trying to tell us the winds and waves of life won't overcome us." No argument here. Or they might suggest, "I really feel God will take care of the storms in my life." Again, that's not wrong. But this is a good time to review some good principles for Bible interpretation and understanding. The key question to ask first is "What is the Holy Spirit trying to teach me?" or "Why did God include this verse or this episode in the Bible?" If we ask that question, we can get an answer that almost seems too simple. But once we get that answer, then we can talk about what we think or feel based on the simple truth of what God is teaching in Scripture.

The point of this episode, the reason why it happened for those disciples and why it is recorded for disciples of Jesus today, is so we see who Jesus really is. When we allow Jesus to show who he truly is, what he's actually like, what he's really about, then Jesus moves us from fear to faith.

And sometimes, if we're honest, that scares us. What do we really see in Jesus? Someone too human? Someone too vulnerable? From the baby in the manger to someone standing trial before Pilate and the Sanhedrin, Jesus was so vulnerable we tend to write him off. And exactly when people tend to give up on Jesus, Jesus shows his true power and identity.

So who is Jesus? Jesus is the one who cares enough for his disciples that he is willing to do more than just wake up and freak out about the weather with them. Jesus cares enough to subject himself to the furious squalls swirling around because of the worst human insecurities. Jesus cares enough to face wave after wave of human hatred. Jesus cares enough to stand his ground against the shifting winds of fickle public opinion about him, winds that acclaim him as a conquering hero one day and turn their backs on him irreversible rejection because won't give them what they want, refuses to deliver on their expectations for what they had cooked up in their own hearts about him. Jesus never abandoned those disciples in that vulnerable fishing vessel. But Jesus was himself exposed to the suffering and torment deserved by every sinful soul. Jesus cared enough that fearful

and insecure disciples wouldn't be drowned but he himself saw his own life utterly destroyed on the cross of Calvary.

Who really is Jesus? He is the one who not only scolded the winds and waves and commanded the storm to shut up, he was able to command his tomb to grant him early release. So that by his victorious life conquering death and fear and hell Jesus can bring calm. Politicians and presidents can promise peace. But so many of world events are outside their control. Self-help gurus and medical experts can advise you on ways to find health and success. But they don't know what's really going on in your life. Jesus is the only one who can utterly, absolutely, completely defeat fear to bring peace to your troubled conscience, security in your relationship with God, and calm of infinite power at work in your life. After Jesus spoke, there were no rustling trees or gradually diminishing waves. There was only, as one Bible scholar describes it, "the sublime symphony of a solemn silence." (Hendriksen)

Cry out in faith to Jesus in your times of need, when fear is genuinely gripping your heart. Real life brings real reasons for fear. That's when Jesus invites you to turn to him. Cry out and embrace him not just as someone special and helpful for you. Embrace him as the Lord of the universe, the one who commands winds and waves. Reach out to him with absolute confidence in his power to serve and save.

That's when faith sees Jesus as master and Lord of your life, source of true life, and then replaces "your faith" inside your heart. The real Jesus then can replace my desire to dictate to Jesus who he should be for me. Now I can have a proper trust in who Jesus really is. Then my heart can rest in him and be sustained by a living encounter with the Lord of the Universe. We enjoy ongoing, limitless blessings from a relationship with him.

Seeing Jesus at work the disciples were brought to wonder, awe, and amazement at Jesus. They were profoundly shaken by this demonstration of power. But they got to enjoy the blessings of that power for their benefit. Today's disciples get a beautiful message from Jesus. It's not just a powerful speech telling us not to fear, because he's got everything under control. It's not just an event that inspires us to put confidence in his plan. Jesus is capable of helping you in our times of need. But more importantly, there's nothing to fear with faith in Jesus. The almighty Lord of the universe is also your deliverer from your soul's greatest anxieties. Jesus cares enough and is compassionate enough to deliver you from trouble. Jesus takes you on a journey from fear to faith. Amen.