

Questions Jesus Asks:  
“Why are you so afraid?”  
Matthew 8:23-27, Psalm 27

Rev. Lynell M. Caudillo  
June 23, 2019

### Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup>When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. <sup>3</sup>Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup>One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. <sup>5</sup>For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. <sup>6</sup>Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD. <sup>7</sup>Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. <sup>8</sup>My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek. <sup>9</sup>Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior. <sup>10</sup>Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. <sup>11</sup>Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. <sup>12</sup>Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. <sup>13</sup>I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup>Wait for the LORD, be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

### Matthew 8: 23-27

<sup>23</sup>Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup>Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. <sup>25</sup>The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” <sup>26</sup>He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. <sup>27</sup>The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

[Pray]

What creates fear in your heart?

Lucy Van Pelt, the “psychiatrist” is “in”. Charlie Brown sits in front of her booth. (Her charge is 5 cents per consultation. Someone should tell Charlie that you get what you pay for!) Charlie is consulting her about a vague malaise....he’s not entire sure what is wrong. She asks: “Do you have dentophobia? That is a fear of dentists. Do you have agoraphobia? That is a fear of open spaces or crowds. Do you have fear of small spaces? That is claustrophobia. Do you have arachnophobia? That is a fear of spiders.”

Charlie thinks for a moment. “I’m not sure...”

Lucy: “Do you have pantophobia?”

Charlie: What is that?

Lucy: “Fear of everything!”

Charlie: “That’s it!!!!”

A survey of Americans reveals that:

51 % of Americans fear snakes

40% fear what I am doing right now--public speaking!

36% fear heights

34% fear being closed in small spaces (Claustrophobia)

27% Fear spiders/insects

21 % fear needles/shots/injections

20% fear mice

18% fear flying in airplanes

Given that list, it would not be too terribly hard to avoid most of those situations.

What creates fear in your heart?

What is the relationship between fear and faith?

God made us, so fear is a good thing, a God-given response in the appropriate circumstance. Fear is a natural response, in the face of threat. "Fight or Flight" response is one that we don't think about, because there is no time. It is an automatic physiological response of our central nervous system. When we sense a threat, in a matter of seconds, a series of things are happening within us. The purpose of which is survival: we must decide whether to stay and "fight" the threat or "Flee" and get away. The bottom line? Fear is a God-given response.

This episode of the boat in the storm is recorded both by Matthew and by Mark. Each of them **set it in a different context:**

Matthew---previous to the boating incident, Jesus had been healing "all the sick" who came to see him while he was at Peter's house. Then as a crowd gathered, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Before they do, Jesus interacts briefly with a "teacher of the law" and "another disciple" about what it really means to follow Jesus, about the 'cost' of discipleship. It is therefore likely that Matthew has in mind that this incident is recorded here in order to teach us something about discipleship.

Mark--- 4:35-41--Mark places the boating incident at the end of long day in which Jesus had been teaching--with use of parables—to a considerable crowd, by the seaside. Among the parables Jesus taught that day were parables about the Kingdom of God being scattered like small, vulnerable seeds, and the tiny mustard seed growing into a large bush.

"When evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side...." Jesus and the disciples are doing something they have done many times before. In fact, that several of the disciples were seasoned fishermen by trade, indicates that they were comfortable on board boats. That said, the topography around the Sea of Galilee, which is 680 feet below sea level, is such that when the weather conditions are just right, severe wind storms can whip up waves.

In a very brief span of time, conditions can change drastically. When they set out, the seas were calm. In no time they are facing life-threatening winds and waves. Just how bad was it? In the Greek, the word indicating "turbulence" is the same word from which we derive the English word "seismic"--in other words, it was earth-shaking, it was big, it was bad.

On the cover of today's bulletin (and on the screen), we have a copy of a painting by Rembrandt depicting this very scene; it is titled: "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee". There is a lot of contrast between light (on the left side of the painting), and the darkness on the right. One disciple is holding on onto the mast for dear life. Another, wearing a red shirt has a decidedly greenish cast to his face as he wretches over the side of the boat.

Take careful look and headcount. There are 14 people in the boat--Jesus, who is sleeping in the dark foreground on the right side, the 12 disciples, and the 14th person is Rembrandt himself! He has placed himself front and center...in essence, straddling the border between light and dark, between faith and fear, between the threatening storm in the bow of the boat and the circle of calm around Jesus in the stern of the boat.

The boat is taking on water. I don't know about you, but I'm looking for life preservers or "flotation devices". I know what's ahead, and not being a strong swimmer, I'd be distressed to say the least! Trust me, I'd be bailing, strapping on a life vest, or doing my best to survive!

Once I went along as a chaperone with a group of students on the Victoria Clipper for a day trip. It was moored right next to one to the cruise ships on the waterfront in Seattle. As several of us parent chaperones were walking down to the pre-boarding area, when one of them audibly gasped!

"Look how small the clipper is!" She said with concern. It was not very reassuring when another of the chaperones started singing the theme song from the old Gilligan's Island TV show: "The weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed"...Her attempt at humor at the time was not appreciated.

There is nothing humorous about a life-threatening situation. The disciples cry out. In Greek they shout three concise words: "Lord! Save! We-perish!" Those verbs are present tense: "We are dying!"

In Mark's version they ask: "*Don't you care* that we are dying?"

At the height of the storm, the disciples wake Jesus who is sleeping. Sleeping???  
(This demonstrates the humanness of Jesus, he is totally exhausted!!)

Let me ask you: Do you ever feel as if Jesus is asleep in YOUR BOAT??

The storm is raging around you--or perhaps--within you...Where is Jesus? Life may feel as if it is careening out of control, and yet where is Jesus? Asleep at the switch?? Doesn't Jesus care?

Now Jesus awakes. Jesus assesses the situation. As LORD, Jesus is master of everything, so it is a small thing to calm the wind and quiet the seas.

As suddenly as the storm began, it ends. The water raging a moment ago is now smooth as glass. Jesus, sleeping in exhaustion, demonstrates his humanity) Jesus, as Creator and LORD of all, can quiet all turbulence completely. Jesus has mastery over nature!

Jesus raises the question of the day: **Why are you afraid?** Like really, Jesus? He's kidding, right! The answer is so obvious—life is out of control, my life is on the line. Help!! I've seen the Titanic. If the boat is taking on water, it's time to DO something, not nap!

### **Have you no faith? Oh you little faiths.**

Do you remember Jesus' teaching about little faith...how much faith is required to move mountains?? A mustard seed size faith. So a very little faith is worth something!

A very little faith is enough to move mountains. That is easy to say when one is not in need of moving one.

A very little faith is enough to calm a storm. Not so easy to say when one IS IN NEED of calming one!!

Jesus is calling them on it...challenging them to live it. Faith is more than words, it is action. Faith is a verb.

Jesus is impatient with their lack of faith because it betrays their lack of trust. It's personal. He is hurt by it. I can understand that, can't you?

It is common to use the words "faith" and "belief" interchangeably, but they are not identical in meaning.

William Sloan Coffin put it this way: "Faith isn't believing without proof—it's trusting without reservation."

In other words, faith is not intellectual assent to a set of doctrines, but willingness to ACT on what we say we believe. For example: Imagine you are at a circus. A skilled high-wire artist has demonstrated so many marvelous feats that the audience has come to believe he can do almost anything. The announcer addresses the crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, how many of you believe that this daring man can ride safely over the high wire on his bicycle while carrying someone on his shoulders? If you believe he can do it, raise your hands."

Throughout the venue, many hands shoot up in the air! You and I might well have raised our own, in an expression of belief.

The announcer continues: “Very well, now who will be the first to volunteer to sit on his shoulders?”

The difference between belief and faith is the difference between staying in one’s seat or volunteering. Ultimately faith is not about believing certain things (doctrine), it is about putting our trust in a person. (M. Copenhaver, p. 39-40) It is about a relationship.

The disciples are in the boat with Jesus. Jesus is in the boat with them. When the storm arises and Jesus continues sleeping, the disciples default to fear. Fear is the normal reaction to danger. The problem is that their fear does not lead them to lean harder on Jesus, or to seek comfort in his presence. Instead it leads them to suspicion and distrust, evident in their question voiced in Mark’s account:

“Don’t you care that we are drowning?”

Underlying this question is the assumption that if Jesus cared, he certainly would not be sleeping! If he cared, he’d hurry up; if he cared, they would be safe. It is almost as if they are daring Jesus: “Prove that you care by fixing my circumstances.”

Then the bargaining begins: “I’ll do A (love and trust you), if you Jesus, do B (protect and get me outta this mess!) This is not explicit in the text, but if I put myself in the boat with them, this is where my mind would go!

Because Jesus and I –Jesus and you—are in the boat together. “Drowning” may, for us, include all the ways in which we find ourselves overwhelmed, overpowered, terrified, by circumstances life brings our way. The unexpected effects of aging for ourselves or our loved ones, economic uncertainty, the life-threatening effects of climate change, drought and the threat of fires here in the west, floods in the Midwest, tornadoes in the south and southeast, and the very real threat of war with Iran. And there is so much more that could easily strike fear in our hearts...

But Jesus is in the boat with us, though at times he seems to be sleeping. How do we reconcile this fact with the fear inducing “storms” I just named? How do we hold our real fears and our real faith together?

The disciples had seen and experienced marvels as Jesus manifest the Kingdom in dramatic powerful healings and miracles. It is not wrong for us to hope and pray for God’s Kingdom to break into our ordinary lives in this way. Paradoxically, some of Jesus’ Kingdom teaching created a sharp contrast, comparing it with the quiet, unassuming power of transformation encapsulated in tiny seeds and their potential to grow into huge trees that shelter birds.

To truly trust Jesus, is to hold these two images of the kingdom of God together: sometimes Jesus’ power is evident in miracles, on other occasions we need to trust that Jesus’ incarnation, his quiet abiding presence in our lives—is enough for the “storms” that we face. Because like the Kingdom, Jesus’ power is paradoxical: it appears to us as vulnerability or “sleep”. In other words, the presence of God, the **mystery** of the Trinity (as we noted last week) is just that: **hiddenness, not absence**.\* Jesus invites us to trust him in the deepest parts of our bodies, minds, spirits/souls.

You may be familiar with the poem entitled Footprints in the Sand (author unknown). In it the poet describes a dream. Scenes from the poet’s life flash across the sky and in each scene there appear two sets of footprints in the sand. However “at the lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints”.

Troubled by this the poet asks the Lord: “...when I needed you the most, you would leave me.”

God whispered: “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

I wonder if Jesus’ questions about fear, refer *not* to the obvious storm, but to his relationship with his disciples/you/me: “Why are you afraid of me? Why do you still not trust in my love, in my presence, in my power, in my good intentions toward you?”

Ultimately the disciples move beyond fear, to wonder and awe: “Who is this man? Even the wind and waves obey him!”

Friends, one thing is certain: Life will have its’ storms, no doubt about it. If our fear leads to distrust and suspicion, it is time to ask for an intervention: Lord, can you transform my fear into faith?

Asking Jesus to transform our fear into faith is the right question. Jesus is present – in the boat with us – inviting us to ever deeper trust!

May it be so!

[Pray]

(\*Debie Thomas, “Crossing to the Other Side”, blogpost on Journey with Jesus, 17, June 2018.)