Why Are You So Afraid?

March 1, 2020

Mark 4:35-41

Key Verse 4:40 “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”

Jesus and his disciples have been working so hard. Because of the crowd, sometimes they were not even able to eat. His disciples did not do much. Instead, they were hanging around Jesus and watching what Jesus was doing. But they were extremely tired. Jesus knew that they could not hang around him any longer. So one day when evening came, Jesus invited them to a picnic by boat to rest up and eat some. His disciples shouted, “Yahoo! Wahoo!” From Jesus, they never expected a vacation by boat to rest and eat, leaving the crowd behind. They felt really good.

The Sea of Galilee is the lowest fresh water lake on the planet; it is 682 feet below sea level. It isn’t as low as the Dead Sea, but the Dead Sea is not fresh water. The Sea of Galilee is a hundred and fifty feet deep, and fish is abundant. Having a lot of fish was a great blessing to the people who lived there. That is why so many of the disciples were fishermen; up to seven of them. The lake is 13 miles by 8 miles, and the water comes primarily from the Jordan River, which flows out of Mount Herman. Mount Herman is up in the north, on the Lebanon border, at 9,200 feet, so the water flows about 10,000 feet down, to fill up this lake. It provides, even today, about fifty percent of the water for the nation Israel. Because the lake is a deep bowl surrounded by high mountains, storms can form quite often. The force of the cold air colliding with the hot moist air around Galilee can be explosive. Waves can be 6 to 8 feet in height. It is a terrifying experience, especially when you are in a boat that is 26 feet long, 7 feet wide with very low sides. First century fishing boats were made for throwing nets over the side and drawing them in.

Look at verse 37. “A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.” Using every skill, every trick of a lifetime of seamanship had taught them, the disciples fought against the storm. The winds were wild. The waves were high. It didn’t take too long before the disciples realized they could not bail enough water. In spite of their knowledge and skill, they were in a nasty situation. Their lives might soon come to an abrupt and unexpected end. Fear captured them. They were totally useless because of their fear. What is fear? Fear is the opposite of faith, for it is the potent weapon of Satan. We are afraid that we will lose what we have worked so hard. We are afraid that God will mess up our carefully planned life. We are afraid that we will get sick such as getting coronavirus and die. Young people are not really afraid of death. But they are afraid of suffering and hardship. They are afraid of losing their easy-going life. For example, Mark, the author of this gospel lived in Jerusalem. He was a mommy boy. He had a spiritual desire to do God’s work, and so he followed St. Paul and Barnabas for their missionary journey. In Cyprus, he saw the spiritual battle first hand, and was caught by fear. In that spiritual battle, Paul used very strong languages such as “You are a child of the devil.” He was gripped with fear of suffering and went back to his mom. Mark was fearful and a man of easygoing mentality. He caused trouble between Paul and Barnabas. But when he overcame fear by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, he became a Gospel writer. St. Paul wanted to make Timothy his successor. But he had a fear problem. Because of his fear problem, he occasionally had a stomach problem. So Paul encouraged him in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.” In light of Christian history, Timothy did not do much. But he was known as the successor of St. Paul. It was because he overcame fear with the word of God. God wants us to be courageous men and women of faith. God wants us to overcome fear, and become powerful men and women of God. Are you a fearful person? Or courageous men and women of God? This is the reason God gave his disciples a storm training. Now we can say, “Thank you, Jesus, for a storm training.”

Look at verse 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?’” The disciples were terrified and they were at the brink of drowning. They were even more terrified by the sound of big waves swamping their boat. In the course of trying hard to save themselves, they forgot that they had Jesus with them. Finally, they searched for Jesus, who was in the stern sleeping on a cushion very peacefully and sweetly. Jesus had peace during the storm. One might argue, “That’s because he was sleeping. He didn’t know what was going on.” But when he was awakened, he was not alarmed at all. One name for Jesus is Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6). Jesus promised his disciples shortly before his death, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (Jn 15:27) Actually God promised this peace to his people Israel as well. Isaiah 26:3-4 says, “The LORD will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.” When we trust in God and in Jesus Christ, we have the gift and promise of his peace.

Jesus is also the Ruler of nature. Look at verse 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.” The supernatural power of Jesus is such that, with a word, millions of horsepower of wind force is halted; millions of gallons of water are stopped, and made calm. What is Mark telling us by this? That we are looking at the Creator God. Until that moment, Jesus’ disciples had seen Jesus heal the sick and drive out demons. But this miracle was on a whole new level. This went from personal contact miracles to control of the weather. Who is Jesus that he can control the weather, not with a prayer, but with a direct command? Who has ever commanded nature and it obeyed? Only God. In Genesis 1:3 God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. Jesus is Lord of creation. For example, the one who can command a dog, “Sit!” or “Stay!” and expect the dog to obey is the owner and master. When Jesus spoke, “Quiet! Be still!” the wind and the waves recognized their Maker’s voice and obeyed. The disciples should have believed that as long as the Creator God is with them, they will never drown. If Christ was in the boat, or to put it better, if they were in his boat, it could never sink!

After quieting the rolling sea with his word, Jesus looked at his disciples. They suffered so much because of fear. They looked like a lamb before the slaughter with frightened big eyes. They were so frightened. Look at verse 40. “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” Here we learn that Jesus wanted to give them a storm training which they could not bear on their own. Humanly speaking, it was not a good picnic or a good vacation. It was a terrible picnic. But spiritually speaking, this storm training gave them wonderful opportunity to overcome their fear. As long as we have fear in our hearts, we are not happy. Even if gourmet food is given to us, the food is not delicious because of fear in us. Here we learn how to overcome fear. We cannot overcome fear by fighting with the rolling sea and speedy winds and swamping water in the boat. Contrary to popular psychology, we cannot overcome fear by trying to be the captain of our lives or the controller of our own destinies. We must have faith in Jesus. Look at verse 40 again. “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” Fear is, in essence, sin to God. Those who are full of fear in their hearts are not normal to God. We must look up at Jesus and hear his word, “Why are you so afraid?”

Mark wrote this gospel to encourage Roman believers who were either facing or about to face Nero's terrible persecutions. It might have seemed for these early Christians that the King was absent, and he didn’t care what they were going through - being fed to the lions, and burned to death. Maybe it seemed that he wasn’t there because he could not prevent these storms taking place, but God wanted these disciples and those who would follow to know that he does hear the cries of his disciples, and he reveals himself in the midst of life’s storms. Mark’s readers were about to be persecuted, and some of them martyred for their faith; they knew that their Lord was the Suffering Servant, who suffered and died for them - but they also needed to know that he was triumphant over death, and in him they could be triumphant even in the midst of death itself.

There are times in life where one might feel that God does not care in the storms of our life. The Psalmists felt it, the prophets felt it, the disciples felt it. These are the times when you may be thinking that God has gone to sleep, God is unconscious, He is not aware of what you are going through - or even if he is aware, he obviously doesn't care, or he is not answering the cries that are from the depths of your being. A Psalmist said in Psalm 13:1, “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” Do you ever feel like that with God? Have you ever experienced what some have called ‘the dark night of the soul’? “God, you are a gracious God, how can you allow this to happen? Lord Jesus, don’t you care that my child is sick? Lord, don’t you care that my marriage is falling apart? Jesus, don’t you care that I feel so alone? Depressed? Lord, don’t you care that I want to give up?” If you have never experienced it, one day you will experience it. Maybe you find yourself just now in a storm, and God seems millions of miles away, and you are asking like the disciples: does he care? The Lord allows the storms that our faith would grow stronger in the test. In the face of the storm, these disciples failed it. I have failed it, many of us will fail it. Jesus is saying, “You don’t have enough faith to believe that I care for you. You don’t need to be in a panic. You don’t need to be terrified. Why such fear? Why such lack of faith?”

Look at verse 41. “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” We expect them to say, “Lord, we will never fear again, as long as you are around. We are not going to worry about anything. We have seen enough. We are convinced.” But that’s not their reaction. “They were terrified.” They were afraid during the storm; now, they are very much afraid. Why? What is worse than having a storm outside your boat, is having God in your boat; that is enough to panic you. They knew what they were dealing with. The living God was in their boat, the Creator, the controller of his creation. Terror set in. Panic set in. It is a terrifying thing to realize that you are in the presence of God. They asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” That is a rhetorical question; it doesn’t have to have an answer. Mark doesn’t even give an answer. Of course, the implication is that they were talking about the Creator God.

With faith and trust in Jesus, we can overcome fear and have peace in a storm. St. Paul was caught in a stormy Mediterranean Sea with 275 other people on the ship. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, they finally gave up all hope of being saved. But Paul stood up and said to them, “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.” Because they were so frantic trying to save themselves, they had no time to eat. So Paul took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves (Ac 27:23-36). As long as Jesus is in our boat, we have nothing to fear, for our boat cannot and will not sink with Jesus in it.

Horatio Spafford also faced personal storms. He was a wealthy man, who lost most of his wealth in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Two years later, he lost four daughters when they drowned in a ship collision in the Atlantic Ocean. His wife, who survived the wreck, sent him a telegram message with the words, “Saved alone.” When he himself crossed the Atlantic on another ship, the captain gave him notice when they were above the place where his daughters had drowned. Horatio Spafford was inspired to write these words on the spot: When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, “It is well, it is well with my soul.” Horatio Spafford did not succumb to bitterness, resentment or despair. The Lord brought him through his storms of life and he left a powerful legacy of faith to others.

When we trust in the Lord, he gives peace, freedom and victory. Proverbs 3:5-7 promises, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.” And Isaiah 28:16 says, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.” Storms are opportunities to build up faith in Jesus. We should not let fear dictate us in the face of storms, but trust in God. Then he will calm the storms as he sees fit, and we will learn who God is in a whole new level.

Big Idea: Trust God in the midst of storms