

Barbara and I are heading up to Lake Sunapee, NH for a week where I look after a summer chapel. It's a sort of a working vacation and over the years it has been a formative place for each of my children and a place to unwind. The only time when I really feel myself tense up, is when I recall a violent thunderstorm that came out of nowhere. Our son, Caleb had taken the sunfish down the lake with a friend of his. I immediately ran down and jumped in the aluminum row boat that had a small outboard. The rain was coming down in sheets. When I turned out of the cove the waves began breaking over the boat. I hugged the shore and realized that I couldn't make it to the other side. I eventually turned back and headed up to the cabin to call the marine police. And just as quickly as the storm had begun, it ended; the sun came out. I took another look out at the lake and there was Caleb waving from a the boat of a good Samaritan with the sunfish in tow. I can't tell you the sense of relief that welled up inside me that day. All this is to say, I understand the terror of the disciples in the boat.

This gospel story holds two emotions close together: fear and faith. Notice how they are. Both fear and faith make sense only in relation to something that is unknown, challenging, or threatening. Those kinds of things make us afraid to be sure. And, it's those very same things that summon faith to face them. In the face of things that are unknown, difficult, or threatening, Mark seems to be saying that there is a clear choice in front of us – fear or faith.

I wonder, is it either faith *or* fear? I believe faith doesn't always do away with fear as it makes it possible to cope with it. Responding in fear or responding in faith are very different responses to the same situation; maybe its not *whether* you're afraid, but *how you respond*. So what moves us from fear to faith? What enables us to act in faith rather than be paralyzed by fear?

What struck me is that it's not the miracle Jesus performs that makes the difference. The disciples seem almost more afraid than they did previously. Perhaps it's shifted from a terror of dying “*–do you not care that we are perishing?!?*” – to more of a holy awe “*–who is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?!?*” – but I don't think the level of fear has changed.

Sometimes we can that faith would be easier to find if we just had a miracle or two. That's not the case here or throughout Mark's Gospel. The disciples have witnessed many miracles, yet they still don't know what to expect from Jesus or even who he is. Miracles in themselves don't seem to make much difference.

The shift in the disciples' reaction – from “do you not care we are perishing” to “who is this” – signifies a shift from *what*, the miracle, to *who*, Jesus. Which leads me to believe that perhaps the answer to – *What moves us from fear to faith?* – is a relationship.

Faith isn't believing certain cognitive propositions about when or how God created the earth, whether or not Jonah was swallowed by a whale and then tossed onto the land. Faith is about a relationship, a relationship with the God revealed by the ministry and words and actions of Jesus. The Jesus we meet in Mark's Gospel is relentless in his pursuit of caring for all of God's children. This crossing of a rough sea is prompted by Jesus' determination to get to the other side, to the land of the Gerasenes, a place few rabbis would venture. It's there where he will heal a man possessed by a demon and return him to the community from which he has been ostracized. And then Jesus will come back to more familiar places to restore life to a young girl and heal a woman who has been suffering for more than a decade.

These early chapters of Mark describe again and again Jesus' determination to free people from all the things that keep them from the abundant life God promises: disease, social exclusion, hunger, even death itself. Jesus reveals a God who cares passionately for the wellbeing of all God's people. Thinking of our baptism, this is the one of whom we are asked: Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Trust is the only thing that overcomes fear. Trust is the only thing that ensures a healthy community. Ultimately, the question isn't *what* moves us from fear to faith, but *who*. The answer is Jesus, the one who will not rest until we see and hear and experience and trust God's passionate love for us and all the world.

When we have a hard time trusting, a hard time believing that in spite of our shortcomings, God still loves us. In spite of those times of loneliness or struggle, God is still present in our lives, at times like this morning when we gather to hear again these stories and remind each other of God's promises.

And when we remind each other of God's steadfast love – we are stepping into the biblical story to play one of the great roles assigned throughout Scripture. At critical junctures across the biblical drama, apostles, angels, and prophets will be sent to the people of God to say those four powerful words: *Do not be afraid*. And each time we say and hear these words, we join all those saints before who find the courage not just to survive, but to flourish; not just to live, but to live with abundance; and not just to get by, but knowing the favor we enjoy in and through Christ, to dare great things, expect great things, ask for great things, and share great things.

May we all continue to deepen our trust in the Lord and one another, for then, and only then, will we discover we part of that beloved community where perfect love, Christ's perfect love casts out all fear.

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5th Sunday After Pentecost, June 23 2024
St. Thomas' Church, Camden*