

“Don’t You Care?” – Fear in the Storms of Life

Thomas Robinson, *Fear, Faith, & Love* 1, August 14, 2016

Mark 4:35-41 (Cf. Matt 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25)

³⁵ When evening came that day, Jesus said to them, “Let’s go across to the other side.”

³⁶ And when they left the crowd, they took him along as he was in the boat. And other boats were with him.

³⁷ And a **fierce gale of wind** arises, and the **waves were breaking into the boat**, so that the **boat was already filling**. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, **asleep on the cushion**.

And they raise him and say to him, “Teacher, **don’t you care that we are perishing?**”

³⁹ And when he was roused, he **rebuked the wind** and said to **the sea**, “**Be silent! Be still!**” And the wind ceased, and there was a **great calm**.

⁴⁰ He said to them, “**Why are you frightened? Do you not yet have faith?**”

⁴¹ And **they feared with great fear** and said to one another, “**Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**”

Matthew 7:24-29

²⁴ “Everyone then who **hears these words of mine and does them** will be like a **wise man** who built his **house on the rock**.

²⁵ And the **rain** fell, and the **rivers** rose, and the **winds** blew and **beat on that house**, but **it did not fall**, because it had been **founded on the rock**.

²⁶ And everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a **foolish man** who built his **house on the sand**.

²⁷ And the **rain** fell, and the **rivers** rose, and the **winds** blew and **beat against that house**, and **it fell, and its collapse was complete.**”

²⁸ And when **Jesus finished these words**, the crowds were **astonished** at his **teaching**, ²⁹ for he was **teaching** them as one who had **authority**, and not as their scribes.

1 John 4:18a

¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear....

Psalm 23:4

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

John 16:33

³³ “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Psalm 107:28-29

²⁸ Then the seafarers cried to the LORD in their trouble, | and he delivered them from their distress. |

²⁹ He made the storm be still, | and the waves of the sea were silenced.

Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the accuser, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Can I be Fearless in a World full of Fear?

Our retreat theme starts from the word "Fearless." What can that mean? Fear has myriad forms. We all experience fear. It's built into us as creatures (Gen 3:10 "I was afraid"). Fear touches every scale of life from war & terrorism, to pollution & ferocious weather, to injustice & corruption in society, to unemployment & poverty, to broken relationships & loss of one we love, to our children's future & our own death, to failure in doing something & peer pressure, to flying & germs, to what friends will think if I wear this. Even the best things bring fear.

You are the only expert in your own fears. The experience of fear is a given. Fear is not a sin. But our experiences of fear teach us that it can be awful & disabling. It distorts reality and often produces bad responses to situations. We want to avoid it and will do almost anything to keep fear at bay. Fear often isolates us, makes us strike out, and see others in the worst light.

One of the Bible's the most often repeated instruction is "Don't be afraid." We want to think about that. Ps 23 points to breaking fear's grip. 1Jn 4:18 speaks of love casting out fear. How?

Thinking about Crossing through a Storm at Sea

One of the main ways early Christians thought about such things was through narratives of Jesus.

The story of the storm was likely told innumerable times, long and short. Who was there?

What did Peter or Matthew do? Etc. In our Gospels it's focused in few words not just on the wonder of stopping a storm, but on issues of discipleship, fear, faith, and identity. In Mk it follows Jesus' parables of God's kingdom and leads to another storm of demonic power.

Fishermen take Jesus in one of their boats to cross the Sea of Galilee. He falls asleep on a cushion. Tired! A howling windstorm rises. Waves fill the boat. Jesus sleeps on. The fishermen know they're about to sink. Jesus' sleeping is strange. They raise him to let him know they're all staring death in the face. Doesn't he care? How can he sleep? They don't seem to assume he can do anything, but they want him to know how fearful the situation is. Wake up!

Jesus rises and simply rebukes the storm. He speaks as creator to his creation, just as the OT describes God speaking. A great calm! Then he asks the strangest question: "Why are you frightened?" Every reader knows exactly why: They were about to die! It is unreasonable to think they wouldn't experience fear. How could Jesus even ask such a thing? Then he follows it with another, almost insulting question: "Do you not yet have faith?" What? The disciples!? Why doesn't he comfort them: "Of course, I care!" I would have. Mark challenges us to think.

Mark says then they were really afraid. It was one kind of fear to face a storm and even death. It was a something new and impossible to understand to realize that the man asleep in your boat could command nature or danger as God does. What could it mean to be with him?

"Don't You Care if We are Dying?"

The disciple's cry to Jesus embodies the most basic human fear – death – the fear behind so many other human fears, struggles, security systems, and aspirations. And with it the question, "Don't you care?" There's so much suffering and death, how can a loving God allow it?

First, the very important truth: Death is part of being human. If you were born, you will die!

Young, old, easy, hard, faithful, profane, all die. We are all vulnerable. Jesus stops this storm, but doesn't promise they'll never have another in life. Most of them died for following Jesus.

Does he care? Yes! But not by changing us from being human. He comes in the boat with us; he is one of us. We are perishing. He takes that death on himself and creates life – beautiful sea.

What did the disciples learn? To listen to Jesus with new perception. He teaches us how to live life and death with joy and beauty. How to build a life on solid rock unbroken by life's storms.