

Why Are You So Afraid?

[Matthew 8:23-27](#)

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Sunday, January 15, 2006

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

For those of you who were here last week, welcome to “Storms, Part 2.” Gareth e-mailed me this week and said, “God often has a lot to say about storms.” For your sake and mine, I hope he’s right.

Let’s pray. Dear Lord, quiet our hearts and minds, even for these few moments, that we might hear your voice and draw courage from your words. Amen.

How many of you have ever been afraid or scared of something? Asked yourself, “Why am I so afraid? Why am I so anxious or fearful?”

Some years ago, in a sudden lapse of judgment, I said to wife, Gae, “Why don’t I take the kids for the afternoon so you can get some things done here around the house?” She looked at me with a sort of stunned expression and said, “Sure.” We only had two at the time and they were young, maybe 2 and 4. So they were having this circus at the Kennedy Center, with all these different acts, clowns; people doing what circus people do, and for some reason I thought to myself, “That would be a great idea. Maybe we should do that.”

We got there and the place was packed; jammed with people. We see this guy juggling, get up to the front. I look down at Michael...smile. I look over at Jessi, who is two at the time...gone. Just this sea of faces. My first thought is: “Dude.” Second thought is: “My wife is going to kill me.” Both the fear of God and the fear of Gae at that point.

I run up these steps that overlook the pavilion, looking out over this mass of people. Finally, this woman comes up to me and says, “Are you looking for a little girl with blond hair?” “Could be.” “Yes, yes!” I’m running down the steps and pulling Michael with me. There is the policeman with the woman holding Jessi’s hand. I pick her up and hug her, hug the policeman, hug the woman; the woman hugs the policeman. I call Gae and say, “I found her, I found her!” She says, “What?” I said, “Nothing hon. I’ll be home in a little bit.”

Looking at the Scripture we read this morning, we realize that the disciples were caught out in a storm and they were scared to death. As Gareth said last week, the sea in both the Old and New Testaments is seen as a scary place... a dark place, where evil dwells and slimy things lurk. However, as Gareth also said, the Lord rules over the sea. Psalm 89 says, “O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up you still them.” (Ps 89:8,9) Our God is indeed a God of power and might.

Jesus sends them

The first thing we realize is that they were out in this storm, not because they were doing something stupid, or they weren’t listening, or they were playing around, but because they were following Jesus. Verse 23 says, “Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.”

Jesus, had been in Capernaum, he had been healing people, talking with people, ministering to people, and he was tired and ready to go. So he gets in the boat and the disciples get in with him. The Scripture isn’t clear on whether or not he knew there was a storm coming, but what it is clear about is that the disciples got into the boat because he asked them to. In fact in other versions of the story, Jesus is pretty much standing there saying, “All aboard!” “Let’s see, Peter you sit up front, John you want to start on the oars...”

This God we worship is a sending God; that's his nature. Just when we get comfortable, he sends us. He sent his son Jesus, he sent Moses, and Joshua, and Paul, and the disciples and Mary the mother of Jesus. What makes you think he won't send you? Here's the thing: don't make the mistake that, just because you find yourself in the midst of a furious storm or in really deep water, that somehow you lost sight of Jesus. Indeed, he might be the one who sent you out there in the first place.

Storm comes without warning

The second thing we see here, is that the "storm came up without warning" in verse 24. Sometimes you don't get a call saying, "Hey, you have a storm coming your way." Unfortunately, we don't all have our own personal Super Doppler or Weather Channel with our name on it.

When our third child was born (we had a little boy) after a few minutes of holding this child, the nurse took him. She began to examine him and noticed that he had a crease across his hand called a Simeon crease. His ears were lower and smaller, his face was flatter, his arms were floppy. She called for a neonatologist, who came into the room and, after 10 minutes, looked at the nurse and looked at me and said, "He has Down Syndrome."

At that point, the storm is on; the waves are breaking over the front of the boat. There's no warning. There are no signs. There is no time to prepare or get ready. We didn't ask for this or sign up for this. One thing you realize if you've been through storms is that you can't wait until it hits to start putting up the plywood. If you didn't put it in there, it's too late to start now. You've got to build that boat and make it strong in good weather and on dry ground. The most important things are often under the water – things people don't see – like the rudder and the keel.

"Lord save us"

So the disciples run to the back of the boat; there is Jesus asleep...the God of the universe... sprawled out, knocked out. Parenthetically, this is one of the ways we know that Jesus wasn't married, because the very next verse would read, "And his wife grabbed the remote and began to beat him upon his head and shoulders." By the way, comments or concerns about this sermon should be sent to gicenogle@NatPresCh.org.

And the disciples scream out, "Lord save us! We're going to drown!" Storms have a way of laying us bare... of stripping away all of the externals...of exposing us for who we are...of prying our hands off of things that really don't matter. These guys aren't worried about their hair or their clothes; it's sheer survival at this point.

The Bible says Jesus looks at the disciples and says, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" You know what I think he is really saying? "What is it you really trust? What are you holding on to? You trust in this boat? In your ability to row? In each other? Think this storm is more powerful than I am?" I think he did the same with me with my son David. I think God looked at me and said, "How about now? Do you trust me now?" Not so funny any more, is it?

I think Jesus looks at us and says (kind of like he does in the passage just before this one), "I don't care what it is, your mom, your dad, your spouse, your kids, your job, your boss, your retirement fund, your good looks, great personality or superior intellect – if you trust anything more than me... love anything more than me... if anything else has a tighter grip on your heart... you will live the rest of your life in fear."

Bonhoffer said it like this,

Those who follow Jesus have no security, no possessions to call their own, not even a foot of earth to call their home, no earthly society to claim their absolute allegiance. Nay more, they have no spiritual power, experience or knowledge to afford them consolation or security. For his sake they have lost all. In following him they have lost even their own selves, and everything that could make them rich. Now they are poor – so inexperienced, so stupid, that they have no other hope but him who called them.

And that my folks, is true freedom, and real security and real power. Jesus said, "He who wants to follow me, must deny himself and take up his cross daily."

Craig Barnes said it like this, "People who have given everything to God are then free to live with more passion because they are not worried about losing things. They already did that when they came to God."

Now finally Jesus, stirred from his nap, looks out over the waves and says, "Be still." And the Bible says, "It was completely calm." You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up you still them – the Lord of the universe.

What about you? What about me? What about us? What challenge is God calling you into? What is the adventure or the risk he is asking you to take? What are you holding onto? What do you fear? Whom do you trust?

The story of Martin Luther King in Montgomery, Alabama; he knew a little about storms. Late one night, the phone rang, and on the other end an angry voice said, "By the end of the week, you will be sorry you ever came to Montgomery." He hung the phone up, and says in his book, "All my fears had come down on me at once."

I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone."

At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever" (I will never leave you or forsake you). Almost at once my fears began to pass from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same (the storm continued to rage), but God had given me an inner calm. p. 114

People like Dr. King, who trust Jesus and Jesus alone, are courageous people. They are risk takers. They are able to stand in the midst of adversity and trouble because they stand with the God of the universe, the One who is able to say, "Be still," the One who even the winds and the waves obey.

Why are you and I so afraid?

Let's pray. Dear God, thank you that you promise to never leave us or forsake us. Thank you that the storms in our lives drive us closer to you. Today, give us courage and strength, and help us to trust you with our whole hearts, minds and souls.

The Psalmist says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble, therefore we will not fear." This week, let us go as people with real courage and strength because we trust the Almighty God of the universe.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.