

Written Copy: Mark 6:48-52 “Steadfast Love When You’re Afraid”

Proper 12-10th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, July 28th, 2024

Text: Mark 6:48-52

⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, **"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."** ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

The text's intent

Jesus refuses to be the bread king for the crowd or the disciples. Instead, He sends them on ahead of Him out into the Sea of Galilee while He remains behind on a mountain in prayer, yet all the while still keeping a eye on them as they row against the wind and are battered by the waves, making no headway. In the early morning hours, He comes to them walking on the water, with no problem whatsoever, capable of walking all the way to the other side. They all see Him doing what no human being could be doing and believe Him to be a ghost, crying out in fear. He calls to them with comforting Gospel words to have courage, He is not a ghost but instead is the LORD God Almighty who is in control of all things, so they should stop being afraid. He climbs into the boat and the wind and waves cease. The disciples are utterly astonished and dumbfounded because they failed to understand the message that He was giving them concerning the feeding, that He is the LORD God in the flesh. They land in Gennesaret where the people recognize Him and flock to Him with the sick needing healing. Wherever He goes they bring them, and He heals them, even those who touch the fringe of His cloak are healed.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is the LORD God who provides daily bread for all creation. He is the God who created the seas and the waves and all things out of love for us. He is the God who came to provide not just temporal but our eternal well-being by conquering our greatest fear, death, through His atoning sacrifice. He rose again so that we might know and hold fast to our future resurrection. With the powerful yet loving words of God Himself He tells us through all His Gospel promises to stop being afraid, because He is the LORD who has all things under control, now and all the way to eternal life to come.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Like the disciples we can put God in a box assuming that some things are beyond His ability to fix, prevent, or protect us from. We expect Him to provide for our temporal comfort with no thought to the spiritual or eternal things we need even more. When He does not do as we think He ought we respond with fear.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Receive His Gospel Words of comfort that take away our fears through His Spirit working in the Word and Sacrament.

Subject Sentence: The Great I AM is with you, stop being afraid.

Introduction: Even Christians are Afraid

I was talking to a friend earlier this week, a Lutheran Christian, who I'll call Stacy (*not her real name*). She was very upset and concerned by something she was told by a Christian who belongs to a different denomination, who I'll call Jim (*also not their real name*). Stacy confided in Jim that she was struggling with worry and fear over several problems that had popped up in her life, the biggest of which was fear about a diagnosis she had received that could result in her untimely death. Jim told her that not only did she have no reason to be afraid, but that if she really was a Christian, she would not be afraid of anything. He went on to tell her that being afraid of death means that you are not really a Christian at all.

My initial response was that Jim must've lived a very sheltered life so far. And that he should brace himself because the LORD has some things to teach him about faith and trust in Him, about the reality of believers, who are saints and sinners at the same time, living out their lives in this broken fallen world.

In my life there are things that I worry about, things that cause fear to rise up in my heart. I'm sure that is the case with each of you, if not at the moment, then in the recent past, or in the near future. But does that mean we should question whether or not we have faith in Jesus? Let's look at the lives of some of those believers who have been set before us in our Scripture Lessons this morning.

Noah's Post Flood World

Take for example Noah. Imagine what it was like for him and his family when he opened the door of the ark and they stepped out. They had just endured 40 days and nights of non-stop rain and flooding, the likes of which had never been before or ever will be again. Then for 150 days, 5 more months, they floated in the ark far above the surface of the earth with no land in sight while every animal and person perished below them. Imagine what a scary thought it was to be the only human beings left alive on the whole planet! Yet, God didn't cast him overboard because he was afraid. The LORD was with them, His hand guiding and directing the ark, making sure that it stayed afloat. He showed His presence and His steadfast love as He provided that ark as the means of salvation for all animal life, for Noah and his family, and from them, for the whole human race.

Then the LORD sent a wind to blow across the surface of the earth to dry up the waters. He caused the flood waters to evaporate or to return to the underwater aquifers, from which our drinking water comes. After 370 days had passed, 1 year since Noah and his family and all the animals entered the ark, the water was gone, and the LORD told Noah and his family and all the animals to exit the ark for good.

Now, imagine what they found. Have you ever seen pictures of what the land and cities look like after a hurricane goes through? Do you remember the pictures of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck? When flood waters recede, they don't leave pretty dry ground and beautiful grass, trees, and gardens. They leave devastation. They leave mud, sometimes thick piles of it, and mixed in debris, uprooted trees just tossed aside. Hurricane Katrina was a Category Three hurricane. It's flood waters never completely covered the tall buildings. Imagine how much worse the whole earth would've have looked after flood waters receded that covered over even the tallest mountains.

Imagine the sight that greeted Noah and family. Maybe some trees and plants had started to grow again. But it would look more akin to a war zone. Talk about starting over from scratch. Add to that the pressure of knowing that the continued existence of the human race depended on you and your family. That would be enough to cause some serious fear, maybe even the kind that would make Noah unable or unwilling to go on.

But Noah didn't need to be frozen with fear. The continued existence of all things didn't rest on Noah's shoulders. The LORD who brought the devastating flood is the LORD who protected them for a year on the ark and ordered them out only when it was safe. The LORD selected the animals needed to repopulate the earth, and that would happen under His watchful care. The same powerful hand that created it all would work the repopulation and restoration of it all, including the world's repopulation of mankind. No need to fear about that Noah, no need to take the weight of the world upon your shoulders.

Yet after seeing the power of what water can do and what happens when it rains 40 days and nights, what would happen to Noah's confidence the next time raindrops fell? He and his family would be afraid, wondering if this disaster was happening all over again. The LORD knew this, and He came to Noah and his family, not to cast them aside as unbelievers, but instead to make a solemn and steadfast promise, His covenant agreement with them and with all the animals: that He would never ever again destroy the earth by a world-wide flood. Let the rain come. With the rain would also come the sign of His promise, His covenant: the rainbow in the clouds. This would remind them that the LORD had not forgotten His promise. Just as surely as they saw it, the LORD too saw it and would make sure a world-wide flood never happened again.

Why would the LORD do this? Wasn't just His word of promise enough? Yes. But He also knows the sinful doubting hearts that exist in all mankind. He wanted Noah, his family, as well as us today not to live in fear, but in confident trust of His promises, and gave the rainbow as a sign to help us. He doesn't want us to live in fear because He has a steadfast love for you, and for me, the kind that never ceases.

The Disciples Fearful Experience

When the LORD showed His power and might in the flood, without His promise of protection and salvation it would've been a scary experience. The disciples had a somewhat troubling and scary experience just prior to our Gospel Reading today. They were faced with feeding a crowd of 5,000 plus, and all they had was 5 loaves and 2 fish. When they looked at this problem from their own limited human perspective this seemed impossible. How would this hungry crowd react when only a meager few got fed while the rest went hungry. That's a scary thought! But not when they put the problem into the hands of Jesus.

In the hands of Jesus this meager offering of food became more than enough. Not only were the hungry disciples fed, who had not had a chance to eat before they set sail for the desolate place where the feeding took place, but the whole entire multitude. In Jesus mighty hands there was more than enough, 12 basketfuls left over.

What was the reason for this miracle? Not just to make everyone happy and give them full bellies. Not just to get the disciples off the hook of having to do an impossible task. It was to show them and the multitude who Jesus of Nazareth really is. He is the LORD God in the flesh. He is the LORD who provides food and sustenance every day for all the animals and people on the planet. Feeding a paltry 5,000 plus was no problem for Him. This is the same LORD God who fed and cared for all the animals who walked off the ark, along with Noah and his family, and had been doing so ever since. This is the LORD God who provides your daily bread, all that you need and have in your life right now.

That was the message everyone should've gotten. But in their darkened sinful minds they missed it. John's Gospel recounting of this miracle tells us that when the meal was over, the multitude was ready to force Jesus to be their king. They wanted Him to be their Bread King who would provide in such a way that they would never have to work for food again! But that is not why the Son of God came down and took on human flesh. If that was all He came to do, people would be fed alright. But that gift would be useless on the day they died.

So, Jesus packs up His disciples in the boat and sends them away, lest they get caught up in this insane movement of the crowd. He sends them out to go across the lake while He heads up a mountain to spend time in prayer with the Father, whose will He has come to fulfill. But even there He is keeping a watchful eye on His disciples. They are struggling out on the water, having to row instead of set sail and let the wind push them along, because the wind is against them. They struggle into the early hours of the morning, 3:00 am, and they still are not making headway. But Jesus is watching.

And then Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. And their reaction? Not one of joy, or relief, but they are terrified. They think they are seeing a ghost! Why? Because no man can be doing that! No human being can walk on the surface of the water, especially when the waves are battering their boat, and the wind is blowing hard.

Why don't they recognize it is Jesus? Our Gospel Reading tells us because they didn't understand about the loaves. They didn't understand what Jesus was teaching them with that miraculous feeding. He's not just a man who can do a miraculous trick with bread and fish. He's not just a man who came to be any kind of temporal king, be it the bread king or the military Messiah they all hoped for. This is the LORD God Himself

This is the God who created the waters and the wind, who has complete mastery over them. Just like feeding a paltry 5,000 was no problem for Him, walking on the water in the midst of a storm is a piece of cake. It's so easy that He could've passed them by, and intended to, to keep walking until He reached the far shore. But He doesn't.

Why doesn't He? Because this is the LORD God whose steadfast love endures forever. It was there for them, even though they refused to believe and understand who He was proclaiming Himself to be. He is the loving and gracious LORD who does not want them to live in fear, and doesn't cast them aside because they don't understand and are afraid, but instead calls out to them saying, (Mark 6:50) **"Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."** Or better yet, you can translate that as **"Stop being afraid!"** And because He is the LORD God, His words have the force and power of God Himself. This is the same God that said, "Let there be" and everything came into existence. The same God that told the flood waters to come, and they came. The same God who told the flood waters to recede and they did. Jesus said, **"It is I"**, translated into Hebrew that would be "Yahweh", or the LORD God over all things. He not only told them not to be afraid, but His presence and His Word worked to take that fear away.

Your Fearful Experience

What causes fear in your life? We all have fears and uncertainty over the future, what is going on in the world, as well as here in this country. You may have your own diagnosis and health problems that cause you to deal with fear. But there is one thing that we all face, me included, that causes the greatest kind of fear, and that is death. We love our lives, and rightly so because they are a wonderful gift. And while we might have some idea what will happen when our time comes, it's still can be a scary thing because its not something we've ever experienced before. Death is scary because its not part of God's original plan for life. It is the separation of the soul from the body. And God never intended for those two things to be parted as part of His perfect creation.

Yet just as the LORD came to Noah when he fearfully got off the boat, just as Jesus called out to the disciples when they were trembling in fear on their boat, He comes to you this very day. He comes to utter those same words, **"It Is I! Stop being afraid!"**

But He does more than just tell you, He's shown you why you need not fear death. That's because He's already been there and come back again. God the Son came to earth to make death for you and me not the end, not the beginning of the eternal suffering that we earn for ourselves by our doubts, our fears, our disregard for Him as the Lord God who deserves first place in our lives. He came to take all those sins, all those things that earn for you eternal damnation, all those things that make death the scariest thing we face, He came to take them all away from you and take them to the cross and die to remove them from you forever. He suffered and died to earn for you the gift of life with God now and eternal life to come.

And He comes to you personally so that you can stop being afraid and instead have confident faith. He came to you in your baptism to mark you as one saved by water just like Noah and set apart to be the beloved child of the Heavenly Father. He continues to come to you right here and right now through the Gospel Message that I am delivering to you. He tells you to stop being afraid because in His resurrection He conquered the power of death. Because you are forgiven of all your sins, your death is the doorway to eternal life to come. Eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. The place where all those things that trouble and scare you will be gone forever, including death. We will live with Him and one another in a perfect peace and love that is beyond imagination. We will live in that steadfast love of the Lord that will endure forever, just as we will endure and live forever.

Conclusion

The LORD came to Noah in his fear and gave him the sign of His covenant promise that Noah and all after him need never fear death by flood. Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples so that they might know He is this same God who had complete master over the water, the waves, the food supply, and any other thing that might bring fear upon them. And He comes to you to address whatever fears you may have. He comes to tell you that He is still in charge of all things, reigning and ruling. You can entrust your life into His hands. He will feed your body and your soul. He will keep you in steadfast faith until the day He raises you from the dead, just as He was, and sets a completely recreated and cleansed earth before you. He comes to you when you're afraid not to condemn you, but turn your head away from yourself and back to Him. He comes to you to give you assurance and strength of faith in the Word and Sacrament. And whenever your last day on earth comes, He promises to be there with His angels to take you to be in His presence now and will raise you up on the Last Day to live with Him forever. Come Lord Jesus, now and on the Last Day. Forgive us for our doubts and fears. And gather us to Yourself now and for eternity. Amen.