

"Fear Must Flee"  
Mark 6:45-56  
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 25, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, "When they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost and cried out, 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."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The events we hear of today happen the very evening of the feeding of the 5000, so we do well to understand how this morning's text builds on last week's text.

If last week's text was largely about the Lord's trustworthiness in the face of immediate bodily need, then this morning let's connect the dots and draw the picture that helps us see: there is perhaps only one thing that captivates us, seizes and paralyzes us **more than** immediate bodily need... and that one thing is *fear*. Where bodily need deals with objective realities of 'right now', fear deals with subjective anxieties of what's coming *next*... could be 'next' by a year, a month, a day, or even a split second. Fear is the simultaneous desire to be in control, the realization you're not, and the despair that you are at the mercy of factors that may not be in your favor. And in that fear, we panic and throw away all we have been taught.

At the risk of beating a dead horse, this past year of Covid is too perfect an example to pass up: Certainly, bodily need regarding Covid (as any other illness) is still present today and should be cared for rightly. But has our response to it been level-headed risk management or has it been driven by fear? Did we all bodily and objectively need to run on the supermarkets and stock up on toilet paper and sanitizer, or did we just *fear* what was coming next? Did we not learn fairly early on who was most immediately in bodily danger, and yet has fear not continually driven the narrative for an entire society and world, even among the youngest generations who statistically have greater chance of dying from the flu? Is it out of bodily need or fear and despair that the suicide rate has spiked and that today mental health services are more burdened than hospitals caring for bodily need?

Was it bodily need or fear that convinced churches to stay away from God for months on end, and convinced others that ‘emergency innovations’ such as online communion and virtual worship are justifiable in such “extreme” circumstances? Isn’t our society still arguing over mandated vaccines, facemasks, and “the Delta variant”, and is that arguing over current bodily need, or is it over fear of what “could, maybe, possibly, there’s a chance” at coming next? (For how long have we said, “Get the vaccine or

don't, deal with the consequences of that decision, and go on with life"?)

But, fear about what's coming next does funny things to us sinners – not just in Covid, but even among children noticing shadows in their moonlit bedroom and wondering what that shadow “could possibly maybe” turn into... and even among adults fearing due dates of upcoming bills and mortgages... and even among citizens who can be driven to the ballot box out of *fear* much more easily than they can out of honest assessment of the body's current need.

Fears over what comes next are not new with us and our generation. There's nothing new under the sun, and – even if specifics of those things that frighten might sound unique (and thus uniquely frightening) it's always been true that – outside of fear, love, and trust in God above all things – fear has always been and will always be a result of our sinfulness and a reason to repent.

Thus, the disciples in the boat are a wonderful example for us of how much even bodily need takes second fiddle to the faulty rationalisms of fear. Our text says the winds were against them, and that they were making headway painfully. The sacred Word never says they were in mortal danger or that their bodies were in the process of perishing, but it does imply that even these

seasoned fishermen were weary and in current bodily need. And yet, when Jesus walks upon the water toward them, they are terrified – bodily need gives way to fear – as they (in their faulty rationalisms) assume a *ghost* is closing in on them. And, who knows what will come next when the shadows of night loom large? (And, notice, in such fear, all bodily need has been forgotten.)

Jesus responds to this fear: “Take heart; it is I (or, more truly, “I AM.”) Fear not.” His immediate response is authoritative encouragement, compassion, love, and also exhortation. But, no matter how much one speaks such comforting, exhorting words; we sinners are easily gripped by fear. And fear will not trust simple promises, no matter how authoritative. A father can promise, “You are safe in your room,” but the child still sees the shadows. A pastor can say, “This is the holy body and blood of Christ,” but people still debate “emergency use authorization” of supposed ‘virtual communion.’

Fear teaches us to doubt the promises. Jesus can promise all he wants, but until he proves himself trustworthy fear will never “fear not.” Don’t misunderstand me: we *ought* take Christ at his word... that holy, immutable, trustworthy word... we *ought*! But we sinners don’t. How much reason we have to repent that our hearts are so easily, commonly seized by fear to distrust even

the Lord Jesus Christ. We *ought* believe His promises, but we sinner's don't. And we won't as long as fear overwhelms faith.

But faith cannot beat back fear without having an objectively true 'here and now' object that proves itself trustworthy in the face of subjective anxieties about what we feared would come next. One can exhort all he wants "Believe, believe, believe"... but until the hearer has something objective to hold on to, he will always ask, "What can I believe?"

Thus, Jesus not only commands the disciples to "Take heart; I AM; fear not" ...but he also gives them *reason* to take heart; he gets in the boat and calms the waves and objectively proves himself to be the very I AM he just claimed himself to be. And the objective truth of what He has just done not only answers bodily need, but also calms fears about what could come next.

Such is not unique with this miracle but is the consistent pattern with his calming of our fears. When he became man and was born of the virgin Mary, the angels declared "Fear not," and then gave the objective truth by which fears could be turned to faith: "Fear not, I bring you glad tidings of great joy: unto you is born this day a Savior, Christ the Lord." As with his birth, so also with his resurrection: "Fear not, Jesus is not here; he is risen, just as He said." The promise is proven true by the objective reality,

that faith may have something objective to hold on to, and fear must flee.

But let us be careful not to incorrectly assume that fear is a direct opposite of faith (as if any admission that you fear means you are not a true Christian!). Fear may hinder us from clinging to the faith, but it is not the direct opposite. It is not “fear OR faith.” More truly it is “faith or no faith; trust or distrust; faith’s warm embrace or unbelief’s cold hardness.”

Our text says the disciples actually had a hardness of heart: “They did not understand the bread, for their hearts were hardened.” We often think of a hardness of heart as narrowly referring to one who *despises* the promises of God (such as Pharaoh’s hardened heart toward God’s sovereignty over His people), but a “hardened heart” also more generically refers to anyone who distrusts and disregards the promises of God, sometimes because they don’t see how it calms their fears and idolatrous anxieties about their *felt bodily needs*. Notice, again, that bond and relationship between *true* bodily needs, *felt* bodily needs, and *fear* that leads to a distrust in and despair of God’s spoken promises.

Thus, Jesus continues on teaching his disciples and softening their hardened hearts – simultaneously overcoming

bodily need and subjective fear! – and he does so by healing entire towns and villages. Isn't that the end of our text?:

“And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was... [and] they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.”

Notice that – he addresses the bodily need and proves to the people they have no reason or need to fear. Whatever comes next in this life is no longer frightening, for – though they themselves may not be in control of their every bodily need – they have access to the One who is. And where they have access to Him, then – by all means – “Take heart; I AM. Fear not.”

Now, fast forward 2000 years, when bodily need is not miraculously met for entire towns and villages in a plain manner that every eye can see our access to Christ... and are our felt bodily needs not defined regularly by fear? Fear of what's next, what's coming, what's unknown, what's cynically possible, what we have no control over: cancer diagnoses, the uncertain outcome and effectiveness of pending surgical procedures, new variants of illness, new regulations that try to persuade jittery citizens government has the situation under control. Where we do not have the visible good outcome for what comes next, our

current bodily need (always provided for by God, every *breath* granted by God) ...our current bodily need – even where its every provision is currently being supplied – nevertheless is not as prominent before our eyes and minds and hearts as is our fear of what comes next.

But we have objective record – truth outside of us and not dependent on the strength of the heart – we have objective record by which fear may be repented of and faith may be firmly planted and may rest securely. For, recall that all of Jesus' earthly ministry – from healing towns to calming waves to walking on water – all of it was to highlight and illustrate that he was the One who – even beyond these comforts and assurances given to a few – He was the One who would (and did) give His Church (those who hope in Him) the greatest reason to never ever fear – for, speaking in view of his death, he would tell us – “Fear not. I have overcome the world.”

With the atoning death of Christ and the victorious resurrection of the Same, with that atoning death giving us access to and uniting us to God in the forgiveness of sins so that we need not worry our sins still separate us from God, but may be certain we are one with God on account of Christ... is there any reason for us to fear what comes next *for us*?

The Scriptures say, “Perfect love casts out fear.” Is Christ’s love for us not perfect? Didn’t his righteous life and sacrificial death prove that? Christ’s love *is* perfect – perfect in intention, in essence, and in delivery. And because it is... because it is perfectly trustworthy and you can depend utterly and solely on Christ’s noble intentions, his holy essence, and his perfect promises, fear must flee... for “perfect love casts out fear.”

Where is there any room for fear for those who have (access to) Christ and his forgiveness? In our baptisms are we not forever tied to Him – not as if attached to a ghost or a fleeting phantom – but attached to the very incarnate, flesh and blood Jesus... and if He is risen in his true body than we too – in our true body – shall conquer death. Neither fears nor tears need remain where the objective truth of Christ’s atoning sacrifice can always be pointed to – yes, as a reminder of his *compassion*, but also as conquering victory over the world, the devil, our sinful selves – anything and everything that would seek to separate us from God and give us reason to fear, despair, and harden our hearts toward his bodily provision and his eternal promises.

But his divine promises are ours; his bodily provision is ours; and his eternal victory is ours. And with such a wondrously undeniable truth firmly rooted **in** history for the benefit of faith all **throughout** history, our stubborn anxieties *first* melt into hopeful

wonder, optimistic musing, as when the psalmist asks: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

And again, the psalmist asks, “Why should I fear in times of trouble, when wicked usurpers surround me?”

And then, those hopeful rhetorical wonders solidify into steely resolve. Think of that resolve known by even little sheep of the good shepherd: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”

Again, in the face of all earthly surprises and tumults, the psalmist confesses, “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains be moved into the depths of the sea” (Psalm 46:2).

And, again, with what resolve even in the face of enemies, when the psalmist says, “The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me? Yes, the LORD is for me; he will help me. I will look in triumph at those who hate me.”

And, note, dear Christian, what the certain resolve is based on – it’s not based on faith. Rather the certain resolve *is* faith **based on** the objective, outside-of-you, once-in-history-for-all-history fact and truth that Christ has atoned for our sins, claimed us as His own, become our shepherd and guaranteed our body

and soul will know victory over any and every present enemy and future danger.

As St Paul says it, “I am convinced (certain resolve based on facts I cannot overlook, explain away, deny or doubt) that neither life nor death, nor things present **nor things to come** (those “what comes next?” things that cause us so much fear).. nothing of that “can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

Thus, repent of your fear and receive the gifts of objective, outside-of-you promise Christ has reserved for his baptized to sustain you in that certain resolve that hangs on his authoritative Word: “Take heart; I AM. Fear not.”

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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