

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
June 21 2009
Glendale Lutheran Church

BETWEEN FEAR AND FAITH: C H A O S

Mark 4:35-41

I.

This day begins a three-week series of sermons entitled “Between Fear and Faith.” Each week, the appointed Gospel readings shall be our guide and governance, always by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At times, anyway, FEAR is at one side of the spectrum of life; FAITH is at the other. Ultimately, they come together at the foot of the cross and the Open Tomb of Resurrection. It is not necessarily a sign of weakness for a Christian to experience fear of one sort or another, nor is it childish; it is a very strong emotion of our humanness.” When you parents, for example (on this Father’s Day) left your young child with a ‘babysitter’ for the evening and your child sobbed and reached out for you, did you not feel your child’s fear of separation? When your teenager drove the car on his/his own for the first time or umpteenth time, didn’t a protective parent’s fear come into the picture for your child’s and others’ safety? When I go to the doctor, my blood pressure inevitably rises – I’ve heard it called ‘white coat syndrome.’ Facing serious surgery, any type of cancer, a loved one’s prospect of dying [I genuinely fear our nation’s debt and what we are leaving for our children’s children] – all of that and so much more yields fear, and why not. It’s not that Christians should avoid fear, or deny it, but accept it as part of life, and then to lay that fear – whatever it is – in the arms of Jesus. THAT’S

THE SUBSTANCE OF FAITH, especially when there is not a single, solitary thing we can do to change whatever brings us fear, that we are able to trust the words and promises of Christ to hear whatever is in the depths of our hearts, and then listen with patience and perseverance for Christ to respond with immeasurable grace.

If only it were that easy. Between Fear and Faith is a whole host of cause-and-effect situations. The first in our series is “Chaos.”

II.

We will sing at the conclusion of our worship a sanctified version of “The Navy Hymn,” which is a good fit to our text:

**Oh Christ, whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy Word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amid its rage didst sleep:
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those who peril on the sea.**

Ah, the rage of the sea. Max Lucado begins his book, Six Hours One Friday, which was quoted extensively last Good Friday, with a chapter entitled “Hurricane Warnings.” It was Labor Day, 1979, and Hurricane David was about to storm onto the Florida coast. He and his friends were trying to secure a houseboat they owned to no avail. A seasoned sailor came up to them and told them not to tie the boat to the trees, which are no match for a hurricane (or tornado or even strong winds) but rather to “anchor deep, say a prayer, and hold on.”

Today’s lesson begins, “Leaving the crowd behind...” to seek rest for their weary bodies and minds – “they took Jesus, JUST AS HE WAS, in the boat...” What a curious phrase – he was as tired as they were, infinitely

moreso. And when someone is tired, he or she can't hide it very well. It was He whom the crowds clamored to hear, He whom they sought for healing, He in whom they held their hope for deliverance from the oppression of Rome, He who had said, "Come to me, you who are weary and I will give you rest" now needed just that. To carry the weight of the world – literally and spiritually here – is not easy; Jesus was exhausted, enough to sleep through a storm. Have you not done that a time or two – I have, and I'm not Jesus!

You know the story. While the gale winds blew, violently and without warning, the waves closing in on them with unbridled, deadly force, Jesus slept. The disciples panicked; who could blame them? It was chaos in that boat, absolute chaos. Like the Titanic before it sank. Every person for himself, yelling, screaming, nowhere to run or hide or escape. And Jesus slept.

Cathie and I have been on that lake, and in a boat that is presumably a facsimile to original boats (OK, probably a tourist trap – there were sour such boats, names after the Gospels – OK, it was a tourist trap). The lake is not large, but long and narrow, and you can see the shores, but if you are caught in the middle of the lake, the water is still deep and wide.

III.

"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" It's a temptation; that is, to drown in the emptiness of our own fears. Here's my definition of that, loosely borrowed from Max Lucado: when what I had thought was nailed down, safe and secure, was coming loose; when calm gave way to chaos; when our security blankets were torn apart at the seam. The key here is WITHOUT WARNING: sickness or disease or loss or grief comes as a thief in the night, or a storm in the night. And, dare I do some repetition, sort of: a loved one

dies suddenly of a heart attack – I wonder how the family of the pilot on Continental Airlines responded. A much needed job is terminated. A baby is born with Downs Syndrome. A home is burned to the ground. A marriage is dashed to pieces. A brain tumor is diagnosed as inoperable. “Teacher, don’t you care if I drown...in my sorrow, in my loneliness, in my anger, in my loss, in my fear?” If you’re the Savior, then save! If you’re the Master, then take control! If you’re the Teacher, then say something! (Oh, I cannot tell you how often I have been in those situations when I have wanted, needed, and been expected to ‘say something,’ when the silence became deafening.) Between Fear and Faith is Chaos. Shouldn’t that be in reverse order; namely, that chaos CAUSES fear? I suppose. I think of Iran following the supposed election, and who knows which came first – chaos or fear. But, to me, chaos is simply defined as being out of control, utterly and unequivocally at the behest of Almighty God. That’s where God wants us, and there is where we need to be.

IV.

Jesus got up and rebuked the wind as surely as he rebuked everyone else who disbelieved his power and authority. He said to the waves, as though they were capable of understanding, “Quite! Be still!” And the wind died down and the waves submitted to his Word. The disciples, says the text, were not only afraid, but now terrified, no longer by the storm and threat of drowning, but by the might and majesty of the Master.

They didn’t know it, but they had seen nothing yet! As incredible as was this miracle, the miracle of the cross makes this stilling of the wind and waves pale in comparison. On that cross, Jesus Christ gave his life for the sins of the world. On that cross, Jesus Christ proclaimed victory not just over temporal drowning, but over eternal death. On that cross, Jesus Christ

rebuked Satan himself and said, “Quiet! Be still!” On that cross, Jesus Christ threw out the anchor for our lives and eternal destinies, deep and secure. It is unspeakably amazing, mysterious and miraculous, that the death of one holy Man called the Son of the Father God would provide sufficient payment for the sins of an entire world, past, present, and future.

Having said that...

Still, these questions beg for answers. At what point does your life seem to be in chaos, whether life-threatening or out of control? How does your faith in Jesus Christ sustain you during the most turbulent times in your life? How are we driven, by the power of the Holy Spirit, from Fear to Faith, both of which are ever-present in our lives? How does that Spirit-driven faith sustain you, even now?

Lucado refers to three “anchoring points:” 1. My life is not futile. 2. My failures are not fatal. 3. My death is not final. He calls them the “anchoring points of the cross,” and I would add, the open tomb.

He concludes, “Oh, by the way, Hurricane David never made it to Miami. Thirty minutes off the coast he decided to bear north. The worst damage my boat suffered were some rope burns inflicted by her overzealous crew. I hope your hurricane misses you, too. But in case it doesn’t, take the sailor’s advice: ‘Anchor deep, say a prayer, and hold on.’ And don’t be surprised if someone walks across the water to give you a hand.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.