

## Sermon Notes – September 25, 2022

(Matthew 14:22-33)

I want to talk a little bit about fear today, but I heard this cute little story about a little boy. There was a storm brewing outside -- the wind was howling; it was raining and there was terrible thunder and lightning. The little boy was scared and his mother put him to bed. She read him a story and kissed him, "Good night." She started to walk out of the room and the little boy asked, "Mommy, would you sleep with me tonight?" Mom says, "No. I have to sleep with Daddy." The little boy thought about that for a minute and he said, "Mommy, Daddy's a big sissy, isn't he?"

Well, this little boy was afraid of the storms. We get afraid, don't we? We have lots of fears. I want you to think about the fact that these disciples were going through a storm, and they were afraid. They were fishermen; they were used to going out at night, but they weren't used to sailing in terrible storms. The last time they were in a storm (in Matthew 8), Jesus had been asleep in the boat. Don't you remember that the waves and the wind were beating against them and they thought they were going to drown. "We're going to die, Lord!" They went and woke him up and said, "Lord, don't you care that we're going to drown out here?" Jesus got up and told the wind to be still, and all of a sudden the wind and the waves calmed down. I really think Jesus hoped that the disciples remembered that experience with him, but evidently, they had forgotten. In today's gospel lesson they're out on the boat in the storm and the wind is blowing over the mountains and hills. The water is coming up over the boat. They are terrified, hungry, and are struggling to make it through because they don't know if they are going to make it without drowning. I want you to know that they were a little bit miffed at Jesus. Jesus sent them on ahead of him in that boat and he said, "I'll meet you over there. You go on ahead of me." Jesus sent them and he wasn't there. I think they were miffed that Jesus wasn't there to protect them like he did last time.

In Mark's gospel (if you go back and read this same story) it says that while Jesus is on the mountainside praying, he saw them straining at the oars in the water. *Can you imagine that Jesus is still aware of what's*

*going on with us? No matter where we are or what the struggle is, he's aware of it.* The scriptures tell us that he quit praying and went to help them on the water. They thought he was a ghost at first and they were fearful and afraid. Peter was the only disciple with enough faith to believe that just maybe it was Jesus. Did you notice what he said? "Lord, if it's you..." There was still that question and doubt if it was Jesus. But, he said, "Lord, if it's you bid me to come to you on the water." He knew that Jesus had the power of the wind and waves, and so, if it was Jesus, he could walk on the water. So he impulsively asked Jesus to help him do something that he couldn't do on his own - only Jesus could help him do it, and Jesus did. But, then Peter took his eyes off Jesus and he felt the wind and the strong waves, and he started to sink. Peter quickly said, "Lord, save me," and Jesus reached out and helped Peter back in the boat.

Do you know how many times in the scriptures we read the words, "Fear not," or "don't be afraid?" Some scholars say that phrase appears 366 times in the Bible - 1 for every day plus 1 extra for leap year. Jesus and the angels often tell folks not to fear. We all have fear, and it's natural, don't we? We have fear of snakes and rats, fear of failure, fear of abandonment, fear of death and dying, fear of getting older, fear of cancer, fear of not being accepted and fitting in. We have all kinds of fears. We also get into all kinds of storms that come at us in life. Scott Peck, who wrote the book, "The Road Less Traveled," once said, "Life is difficult and healthy people do not deny the storms of life, they find the strength to move through the storms." Jesus came to give the disciples and us the strength to move through the storms. There are storms that come to us and we get so overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, discouragement, and disappointment -- we feel like we're going to drown. We wonder, too - just like Peter did - "Lord, don't you care? We're about to drown out here." Sometimes we feel that, too.

What do we do with our fears? I want to tell you about some people who have overcome their fears. Patsy Claremont is a speaker with "Women of Faith." She's traveled all over the country and the world speaking with this organization. But, she was not always able to speak in public; she had a fear of speaking in public and being around crowds of people. In fact, when her kids were little, her husband had to go to the PTA

meetings and to the ballgames with the kids. She wouldn't even go to church with them because she didn't like crowds and being in public with people. Somebody told her that she needed to pray about it and give it over to God. So, one day she decided to pray about it. She said, "Lord, you know how afraid I am of people and how I don't want to be in crowds. I need to do something about this fear so I can be there for my kids and my husband." So, she began to pray about it and read the Bible. Somebody gave her some scripture passages to help her with that. She said, "I began to pray about it and read those scriptures every day. As time went on, God gave me the strength to get out in a small way. I did that a few times and got scared again. I stayed in the house for a while and I had to pray again." As time went on, Patsy overcame her fear. I want you to know that she now speaks in front of thousands of people in audiences around the world and in this country. She also gets on a plane by herself; she goes to her kids and grandkids activities. She says, "If it hadn't have been for my faith in God and God giving me his strength and the promise of his Word, I wouldn't be around crowds of people even now."

Many years ago, I told you that when I lived in Savannah, Georgia, my apartment was burglarized there. I lived by myself and I was in an apartment on the second floor. My apartment and one other was broken into that night. What I didn't know was that the police said they looked at the windows because all my windows had locks on them and were locked, but when they went back to check them after the burglary had happened, one of the windows had been unlocked and was left open just a crack, so these guys could get back in. It was three or four guys that had broken into my apartment looking for stuff that they could sell and get money for drugs. The police were having a hard time catching them. They had already busted into six or eight homes in the area. I knew that these burglars could come back and I was afraid to stay in my apartment by myself. So, for two weeks I stayed with a family in the church. Then, I said, "I have to go back home - I need to be back in my own home." I want you to know that I had to do a lot of praying and I stayed awake the first two nights. I probably didn't sleep one hour the whole night. I was afraid somebody would be trying to come in my window (even though it was locked) or break through the door. I want you to know that it took

me awhile to get comfortable sleeping and staying in that apartment, but eventually, through prayer and God's promise to be with me, I gained the strength I needed.

You know, the people in the Bible dealt with fear. When Abraham was called by God to a land where he had never been, God told him, "Fear not for I am your shield and your reward will be great, Abraham." When the Israelites were going to be delivered by Moses from Egyptian bondage and they went to the Red Sea - do you remember they were standing at the Red Sea and behind them was Pharaoh's army? They were caught between a rock and a hard spot - "If we go this way, we're going to drown. If we go that way, they're going to kill us! Moses, what'd you bring us out here for? We're going to drown! We're going to die!" Do you remember what Moses said to them? ... He said, "Stand still. Fear not and see the salvation of the Lord." ***When Jesus tells us to, "Fear not," he's not saying to stop what you are doing. He's saying to move forward and trust him to be with you and to walk with you.***

You know, it's amazing when I am with people that are grieving and going through passing from this life to life eternal with God. Many times, they want you to quote or read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm with them. They love that passage that says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Do you remember when Mary was getting ready to have baby Jesus and she was scared to death? She was a little 13-15 year old teenager and she's going to have a baby. The angel says, "Fear not, Mary, for I bring you good news of great joy." Can't you imagine her saying, "Lord, what am I doing?" Jesus often told us to, "Fear not" and to trust him. When Joshua was leading the people, Jesus said to him, "Fear not. Don't be discouraged and dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." ***What Jesus wants us to remember is that no matter what we're going through, he will be with us. Does he take the storm away? ... Not always. Sometimes we have to go through that storm and we have to deal with our fear and our anxiety, but he will get us through it.***

Alexander Solenski was in a Russian labor camp during the World War II. He said there had come a point when he'd been there for several years

that he just wanted to commit suicide. He wanted to die. He was ready to be over starving to death, being without proper clothing and warmth. Russia tortured their prisoners and made them work hard. He said, "One day I went out and just wanted to die. I was put out on work detail. They let us take lunch break for twenty minutes and I sat down on a bench. I was by myself on that bench. All of a sudden, a stranger came up and sat beside me. It was somebody I didn't recognize. It wasn't a Russian guard. It wasn't a prisoner. The person sat down and must have known I was going through a rough time. He took a stick and in the ground, he carved out a cross and then he disappeared. I never saw him again. I never knew who it was, but they carved out a cross. That day, that cross gave me the strength and courage to go back into that prison another day. My storms didn't end, but I found the strength and courage that God would be with me and get me through" -- and he did. Alexander survived. He said, "If it hadn't have been for that cross, I wouldn't have made it. I knew Jesus loved me and he would give me the strength I needed - Jesus was with me."

Sometimes when we go through the storms of life, no matter what it is - cancer, facing death - we get afraid. Even in facing surgery sometimes, we get afraid. ***When our sense of security is threatened, we get afraid. Jesus wants us to let him be our security and be the one who will get us through the storm.*** Jesus said to his disciples (when he got ready to leave them): "And, lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age." I will see you through the storm. He wants us to focus our hearts and minds on him rather than being fearful and always getting so consumed by our circumstances and our situations. When we want to give up, he wants us to keep our eyes on him and keep trudging on. He will see us through. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

I want you to notice in that story that when Peter took his eyes off Jesus, it said that he began to sink and was about to drown. He said, "Lord, please save me!" I want you to know that sometimes you and I are just like Peter. Sometimes we falter in our faith. We are strong some moments and weak at other moments. When we fail, Jesus wants us to call on him - to know that he hears and he will answer us, and he will be there.

How do we deal with our fears? ... a lot of prayer -- a lot of practice. And sometimes, we are going to fail, aren't we? But, we can always reach out and say, "Lord, help me! Lord, save me!" He's always there to reach back and see us through. God is our strength and refuge, a very present help in time of troubles. He will help us in our fears and in the storms of our lives. Amen.