

3-22-20 **OVERCOMING THE FEARS OF LIFE**

(Matthew 14:25-33)

As I look over the hill and out over Lake Erie my reflections turn to Matthew 14:25-33. The disciples are in a small boat on the Sea of Galilee in the wee hours of morning and a storm kicks up. Legitimately, a storm often stimulates FEARFUL feelings and trepidation. And I am sure that the disciples were very aware, if not a bit fearful, as they were being buffeted by this particular storm. To their amazement, a ghost like figure approaches them --- they think that it may be a ghost --- and their FEAR level goes up even higher. They learn that it is not a ghost but Jesus – walking on the water --- telling them to “NOT BE AFRAID.”

Peter, always with an impetuous and enthusiastic response, asks Jesus to validate his identity by calling Peter to “come” and to walk with Jesus. Of course, most of us know the story – no more does Peter get out of the boat and begin walking on the water towards Jesus that Peter becomes AFRAID. As Peter is sinking, he cries out to Jesus. Jesus lifts him up and takes Peter back to the boat and calms the storm.

A number of people shared with me regarding the very real fears of their lives and how these fears are at times genuinely troublesome and even consuming. INDEED, the fears of life are often crippling and consuming.

DOES THE BIBLE HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT ‘FEAR’?

Throughout the Bible we read and are told in various forms to “FEAR NOT” & “DO NOT BE AFRAID.” When looking specifically at the Gospels and considering over a 125 of Christ’s imperatives or commands – 21 are of the genre of “FEAR NOT.” The second most common directive by Jesus is to “love God and neighbor,” which appears only in eight occasions in the gospels! WOW --- even Jesus recognized the challenge of our consuming & distracting fears.

WOW! JESUS ADDRESSES FEAR MORE THAN HE ADDRESSES THE NEED TO LOVE GOD & OUR NEIGHBOR!

In fact, in today’s text, we’ll see that it is nearly impossible to take the necessary STEPS OF FAITH that essentially opens our lives to God’s transforming love and grace.

IMAGINE THAT! We can hardly know and experience the love and life of Christ if FEAR is allowed to control us – essentially holding us down and holding us back from experiencing the fullness of Christ’s love and passion.

Matthew 14:22-33 – Jesus (and Peter) Walks on the Water

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, **buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.**

²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, **they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.**

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”**

²⁸ “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹ “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid** and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

FEAR in its simplest sense is AN INTERNAL WARNING CRY that DANGER IS NEAR --- it is meant to motivate us to take EVASIVE ACTION --- to FLEE, to HIDE, or to FIGHT ...

- GOOD FEAR versus BAD FEAR
- REAL FEAR versus PERCEIVED FEAR
- HABITUAL & ENGRAINED FEAR

CONSUMING & CRIPPLING FEAR ROBS US OF:

- + SELF-ESTEEM + ULTIMATE DESTINY or PURPOSE or MISSION
- + JOY + AUTHENTIC INTIMACY & RELATIONSHIP
- + LIMITS OUR ABILITY & CAPACITY TO HELP OTHERS

RETURNING TO THE TEXT:

1. Note that Jesus sent the disciples into the waters, which I am sure he knew would become a storm --- hmmm ... perhaps our experience of some of the 'storms of life' are God-intended (22)
2. The storms of life combined with our natural limitations often distorts & frustrates our ability to see Christ clearly. (26)
3. As a parent's presence calms a crying child – so, too, realizing Christ's presence helps to alleviate our fear. (27)
4. In the storms of life --- Jesus will call us to "COME" if we are looking & listening (28-29)
5. Peter was pulled down by the consuming weight of his own anxieties, fear and worry (30)
 - We feel the full weight of our circumstances and fears when we turn from Jesus ---
 - Jesus lifts everything that weighs us down when we
 - 1) look to him,
 - 2) ask him and
 - 3) reach up to him

It is absolutely critical to be willing to LET GO of all the things that are holding us down --- especially crippling FEAR

Crippling FEAR – Consuming FEAR CAN SINK US FASTER THAN MOST ANYTHING ELSE --- ESPECIALLY, IF WE NEED TO FLEE, HIDE, or FACE

NOTE Jesus' address to Peter --- when we are walking with Jesus --- FAITH is ESSENTIAL to staying on top of the buffeting waves of life.

FAITH – COMMITTING ALL THAT WE KNOW OF OURSELVES TO ALL THAT WE KNOW OF GOD

- FAITH comes from God's enabling grace thru the Holy Spirit
- FAITH REQUIRES US TO LET GO & TURN FROM WHAT IS HOLDING US DOWN & HOLDING US BACK

FAITHFUL PEOPLE ARE COMMITTED & DETERMINED TO EXERCISING RESPONSIBILITY & CONTROL -- COMMITTED TO OBEDIENT ACTION!!!!

I CAN ACT ---

I NEED TO ACT

- IS THERE A FEAR THAT IS PREOCCUPYING OR CONSUMING YOU?
- IS IT A REAL FEAR? OR A PERCEIVED FEAR?
- JESUS, WHERE ARE YOU IN THE STORM OF MY LIFE
- JESUS --- HELP ME
- JESUS --- I AM LETTING GO OF MY FEAR AND REACHING OUT TO YOU (COMMITTING ALL THAT I KNOW OF MYSELF TO ALL I KNOW OF YOU) SO THAT I CAN BE FREE TO RESPOND AS YOU WOULD HAVE ME RESPOND.

THE REAL QUESTION MAY BE:

1. HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD? And
2. DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT GOD IS PRESENT, THAT GOD CARES, and THAT GOD WILL HELP YOU THRU THE STORM?

Dear God ... I have many fears ... some are real and some are merely my foibles and perceptions. Regardless – they are holding me down and holding me back from experiencing you more completely. Please help me to see you in the midst of the STORMS of MY LIFE. IN SEEING YOU, PLEASE HELP ME TO ACT IN THE FAITH & CONFIDENCE THAT YOU ARE WITH ME AND THAT YOU CARE ABOUT ME AND THAT YOU WILL HELP ME TO DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. IN Jesus' mighty name, AMEN.

F ---FACE YOUR FEARS WITH FAITH

E – EXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE FACTS

A – ATTACK YOUR FEARS WITH ACTION & FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

R – RELEASE YOUR CARES TO GOD