

The 4th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: June 20, 2021

Proper 7: Mark 4: 35-41: *We have nothing to fear but fear itself!*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Good? Afternoon (morning) everyone, and happy Father's Day to all our fathers. Thank you for all you do to shape our lives, and for the example you provide us in managing the ups and downs in life. I hope that you feel honored and loved today for all your hard work. Good fathers and mothers have a natural impulse to protect their children and to serve as an example to them in tough times. I think it's appropriate that our Gospel reading for today falls on Father's Day. This is a story about the disciples caught in a terrible storm. They need courage. They need leadership. And they need an example of how to face a challenge that is beyond their strength. If you've ever been through a terrible storm like that in your life, then I believe you'll get something out of today's Gospel message.

My brothers and sisters, fear is our greatest foe. Fear keeps us from doing the kinds of risky things that may hurt or harm us. But, fear can keep us from fulfilling our potential, from standing up for what's right, or more importantly, from feeling secure and safe in the world or even in our own skin.

For those who are fearful to get the Covid 19 vaccine, I would say this to you: God has given you and the whole world a great and wonderful gift. God has given to the entire world, a vaccine that will protect you and save your life and the lives of your loved ones. Remember this, God is not a magician that pulls a rabbit or a vaccine out of His hat. God works through human beings. Think about all the virologists, epidemiologists, infectious disease doctors, nurses, scientists, and all those ICU and hospital health workers who saved all those who were sick. All of this is God's work. God gave all of them to us, as a gift to the world. Their work is a vocation. Their work is a calling from God to do this very hard work. All of them do God's work. When fear goes into overdrive, all reason, knowledge, and trust go out the window. All we feel is mind-numbing, anxiety-producing, paralyzing terror. Faith is born out of inner calm. Fear disrupts inner calm. It's hard to have faith when our trust-meter has flown off the charts. So, why are you afraid, have you no faith?

Those are moments when, no matter how strong your faith, your mind is focused on only one thing: fear. Once our bodies hit the panic button, our inner alarms go off, and we are on high alert. This kind of stress happens today to many people who have suffered through trauma, those with some form of Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD), which by the way you can have without ever having gone to war, as we now know that many trauma survivors suffer these same or similar symptoms, or those still living in abusive situations. It's the kind of stress that literally kills people. It causes underlying heart conditions, it taxes the immune system, and releases toxins that prey upon the body, often leading to an early death. Yes, indeed my sisters and brothers, fear can kill.

It's no mistake that people who pray, people who have faith in God or what AA might call a "higher power," or people who more easily trust and take healthy risks, are healthier, happier, and live longer and more satisfying lives.

This kind of trust or faith in our families, others, our surroundings, ourselves, and in Jesus too is what sustains many of us through difficult circumstances when life throws a curve ball. If fear is a killer, faith is a lifesaver. Faith gives us a steady hand amid turbulent times. It allows our spirits to feel secure even

when the boat we are in is rocking and pitching in the choppy sea of the culture around us.

Today is Father's Day and many of you will celebrate fathers who have made you feel strong and secure, given you confidence in yourself and your world, who maybe just was a strong presence in your life, someone who was always there for you. Not everyone has had a father like that, and for those who haven't, our hearts are with them, for they have had to find other sources for their faith and security. But for those whose father was their rock and who made them feel safe and unafraid, you know how valuable that person has been in your life.

For those with "good fathers," even when nothing is going wrong, when Dad is in the house, we feel safe and sound, as though just his presence makes us feel like our world is secure, at least for that moment.

In a sense, this is what Jesus does for us as well on an even bigger scale, and we see it today in the scriptures.

Mark the evangelist tell us, a "great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion." So here we are. One of those nasty storms came up quickly, a particularly terrifying one. Winds are pitching the boat into the

waves. Water is pouring into the boat. The disciples try valiantly to battle the rising waves, and keep the boat steady, but they fear it will capsize any moment, and the water is filling fast. Meanwhile, Jesus is sleeping through all of this! That is incredible, isn't it? He must have been exhausted! Or he knows all will be well. But Jesus isn't moving. So, the disciples wake him up. Why do they wake him up? They are terrified. They felt worried, insecure, unprotected, and their Lord and Savior it appears is out of touch. Jesus is sound asleep! Out of sight and out of mind. Not paying attention to their needs, not focused on their fears. In the story of course, Jesus wakes, immediately calms the storm, and then asks them that punchline question: "Why are you afraid?" "Don't you have faith in me?" (PAUSE) Which storm did Jesus calm? Not just the wind and the waves. He calmed the storm within them; that fight and flight, terror in the moment, panic button kind of insecurity that obliterates our inner calm and makes of us a turbulent, irrational mess. That's what Jesus calms. Our inner spirit. Jesus commands "Peace! Be still!" "The wind ceased, and there was a dead calm." The Apostles are amazed!

We all have these kinds of turbulent moments in our life when we are certain that we are in peril and God is not paying attention. We expect God to be there in our every moment, so that we feel the certainty and security we need

to live with peace and stillness in our hearts. And when we one day can't feel God there, or it seems that God is "sleeping on the job," we begin to panic. We lose our footing. We lose our heads. We lose our confidence. Our faith begins to slip. But just as in the story of Peter whose faith allows him to begin to sink, Jesus reaches out a hand to pull us back up again. Just when we believe he is out of touch; his voice calms our waves and stills our spirits. Repositions our foundation. Restores our faith.

God may appear sometimes to not hear us, to be absent in times when we feel we need God most. When time goes on and things seem out of hand, when the days go long, and the storms don't stop, it can feel sometimes like God is quiet. Or worse, not there. That's when our faith can begin to slip, and terror can set in.

But, Jesus is always there in our corner, there in our boat. And just at the moment we are convinced, he isn't paying attention or does not care, a miracle will occur. Maybe it won't happen at the exact time, we hope it will. Maybe it will look differently than what we thought it would, what we thought might happen, or what we prefer might resolve our pain. But Jesus is always there to still our storms and calm our hearts, to restore our faith, even in the worst of times.

Here is the challenge of a lifetime from this week's Gospel of Mark. The day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt knew America was not prepared for another world war. The next day, Roosevelt delivers a speech to congress and the country on this dark and fearful day and he tells the country, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself!"

We are living in a tempestuous and dark time in so many ways. From the pandemic, to unemployment, from political unrest to cultural change; to the barriers which divide us as a nation. Sometimes it's hard for us to see Jesus during this time. Instead of relying on our faith, on the Holy Spirit to keep us peaceful and still, we continue to try to steady our own boat, scoop out the water from what feels like a sinking ship, and try to return to the shores from which we came instead of moving forward. But listen to the voice of Jesus, Holy Trinity Church. Jesus has heard your cries and Jesus is speaking to you above the wind and the waves of your lives: "Why are you afraid, Holy Trinity Church?" "Have you still no faith?" No matter what is happening around us, no matter what challenges we face or what new horizons look threatening, Jesus is in our corner. Jesus is in our boat. And Jesus will lead us into a place of still waters, a beautiful place, a new place, and an exciting adventure. So, stand up brothers and sisters. Face the winds. Enjoy the ride.

**The Holy Spirit will always guide you. And that is all you need. Say alleluia,
say, AMEN!**