

1 Samuel 4-11,19-23, 32-49 and Mark 4:35-41

What are you afraid of? If you were to make a list of three things of which you are most fearful...and prioritize them, how would it look?..... What would be first, second, third?..... Are you afraid of what others think of you? Of something that happened in your past...or something that is happening now...or in the future?Are you afraid of some large national or international issue....or do you fear something more personal in your life? Are you afraid of losing control.... Do you fear for your safety? Are you afraid to step out and take risks? Have you let fear "own" you?

OK...now that you are all sufficiently facing multiple reasons to be afraid....

Let us be in prayer together: God who tells us to "fear not", may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Both stories of scripture this morning are about dealing with fear. Young David is the only brother who is so fear-less...that he is able to walk up to the giant Goliath and have the confidence, that he can defeat him. And he did it with a simple stone slung from two strong pieces of string and a patch of leather.

And when Jesus was with his disciples in a boat upon the Sea of Galilee...as I was with my tour group when I visited Israel/Palestine....a storm came up and tossed them around while Jesus slept on a pillow. Rather miraculously, a sudden storm came up when I was there, too, the winds were ferocious, our boat rocked side to side and we all got drenched in the downpour...only to have it stop as suddenly as it started and the sun shone through gleaming white puffy clouds again. It was a wonder. We looked at each other to see who might take the part of Jesus!

As the disciples clutched in fear, they woke Jesus up asking if he didn't care that they were thrown overboard! It is interesting to me that in this little story...Jesus actually scolds the wind.... Now when you are ever in a bad storm for instance, when Irene filled our rivers and roadways; did any of you think to tell the storm to just "Stop that!?"

And then Jesus speaks to the sea. I love this. He does not ask God to make the storm quit...he talks directly to the sea, as though our created world has personalities and we can be in relationship with nature in ways we may not fully comprehend.

Jesus tells the sea to "Be still. Peace!" And the sea listens and becomes "dead calm." I think this is an important part of the story. Jesus, talking to the elements. Somehow, this human/divine figure had a relationship with nature that would be worth exploring!

And then the story points us to situations to which we all relate --- times when *we* have been afraid? Jesus talks directly to *the disciples*. I do not hear him reprimanding them as some versions say, but just asking them, "Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith?"

This might be a question we ask of ourselves...or of one another? Why *are* we so afraid? Where is our faith?

Jesus never said there is nothing to fear. Fear sometimes motivates us to take precautions like upgrading our smoke detectors... wearing seatbelts just in case we encounter crazy drivers... Most of us don't do dare-devil tricks like walk on tightropes between buildings ...or ride motorcycles with 75-year old drivers...although some of us DO!

Somebody asked me if I was afraid of our future...of retirement. There are a lot of unknowns, like who will buy our house and where we will live but, no, I really am not afraid at all ...what is there to fear?

So often, what we fear turns out to be nothing...right? Our daughter waited several years to have a wisdom tooth out. She dreaded it! She got stressed out just thinking about it. Finally, (and this had nothing to do with *my* encouragement) she made the appointment... and it was not bad at all! She was almost giddy with joy when she realized that her fear had been much worse than the actual event!

Fear can paralyze us...fear can close us down and lock us up. Fear is not healthy...we all know that! Fear can stress us out, wear us out, make us paranoid, irrational and non-functioning!

Imagine the fear...of small children being separated from their families...I *am* afraid of the abuse of power in our own nation! I am afraid for our country....for the polarizing sentiment that liberals are somehow bad...I got a letter in the mail this week saying that "liberals were radical anti-Christians!" !! What !? I am afraid of political manipulation and misinformation that pits one side against another... stirring up emotions and distrust and even hatred!

We need to be able to see what is true about multiple issues....to be able to see how they are related....to look for solutions to real problems. We are in a political storm that is tossing this little boat of a nation of ours so that many people *are* afraid! We have *got* to get a grip. How do we regain rationality and reason and remember this country's ideals to which all of us cherish? I feel like shouting to this mayhem: "Be still! Peace!" Maybe if we all prayed this together....be still, peace!

Would Jesus ask us why we are afraid? Would he wonder about our faith in the midst of this? Would he remind us of the power of a strong kind of love, honesty, compassion, curiosity and generosity... an openness and a fear-less effort to bridge the gaps....is this what Jesus would say?

Maybe I'd rather huddle together with the other disciples, with all of you...and blame someone else for the turmoil. But over and over Jesus said not to be afraid. Michael Lindvall calls these the "first and last words of the Gospel. They are the words spoken by the angels to the terrified shepherds outside of Bethlehem...and they are the words spoken to the frightened women who come to the tomb on Easter morning." "Do not be afraid."

Frederick Buechner preached on this text saying that it points us outward and onward..."Go...Go for God's sake, and for your own sake, too, and for the world's sake. Climb into your little tub of a boat and keep going!" Buechner said that "Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and...in whatever way we can call on this Holiness, as the fishermen did; to come awake within us and to give us courage, to give us hope, to show us, each one our way..."

David walked up to Goliath with just some string and a stone...he was fear-less. Perhaps he remembered that God chose him to lead... maybe he felt God's protective Presence. Remember that David threw off the heavy armor that his brother soldiers wore to protect themselves. He faced his fears with just himself, the talents he had, and the faith that God was with him. Might we face *our* fears with just ourselves, the talents we have, and the faith that God is with us....all...remembering that we are not alone?

May this God/Christ/Spirit be with us especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we're done, so that even in their midst we may find peace... Amen.