

Mark 4:35-41

Fear of Circumstances

Fear. Some fear is necessary as it keeps us out of harm's way. One should fear crossing a barrier into a lion's cage at a zoo or a barrier that keeps one from a steep rock face such as can be found at Kakabeka Falls unless you have the skills to deal with such things. Even then a healthy dose of respect for the challenges should be apparent. Those barriers are there for our safety.

And when we look at the world and what people are dealing with, most of us can't even begin to imagine the fear of those in the Ukraine or Gaza that are living in such dangerous and life-threatening times or those who face displacement or are food insecure. Even closer to home would be the fear that many live with in terms of not having enough money to cover their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter and those who live with a constant threat of violence on the streets or behind the closed doors of their homes. There are also phobias and anxiety that one may not be able to deal with on their own and need to seek help.

I have been doing some reading about fear and Dr. Karl Albrecht writes that, "A simple and useful definition of fear is: An anxious feeling, caused by our anticipation of some imagined event or experience.¹ And then he boils down our fears to five basic things which need some unpacking, but suffice it to say that it pretty much all has to do with fears around how we exist in the world from our actual bodies to how people make us feel, like the fear of being shamed, which gets into our self worth.

We are in the middle of a series of sermons in which we look at times when Jesus spoke the words "Do not be afraid" or some version of that phrase. This scripture from Mark when Jesus says, "Do not be afraid" comes when the disciples experience fear during a storm in the boat as they crossed the Sea of Galilee. Now many of these men were experienced fishermen. They knew what to expect on those waters and how storms could come up at a moments notice. Their experience also gave them a healthy respect for the power of nature and this storm had them more than worried.

Their fear of the circumstances they found themselves in was overwhelming and yet somehow Jesus was able to sleep through it, well that was until he was abruptly woken up by those who couldn't believe that Jesus was not phased by what was happening around him. Their lives were in peril and this man that they had witnessed take control

¹ [Karl Albrecht Ph.D. The \(Only\) 5 Fears We All Share | Psychology Today](#). Accessed February 6, 2024.

of other situations through teaching and healing was not showing an ounce of concern for their well-being in this moment.

However, even in their fear, it is likely that they had not anticipated what would happen next. Jesus took control of the circumstances; he silenced the storm! Well, if you think the followers were fearful before, now they were really fearful. Think about it. If Jesus could control nature itself, then what did that mean for their lives. They had chosen to follow someone who they realized could change the course of everything they had known and experienced.

Now this particular passage has been used to talk about how we are in a boat comparing the boat to our lives and Jesus being in there with us, and the boat itself gets a lot of attention. That is one take that has brought a lot of comfort, direction, and help to people in their journey of faith. And it is not incorrect, but what if the boat is just a boat, a vessel to get from one place to another. The boat was a way to get the men from one side of the lake to the other. And the other side of the lake held some pretty challenging moments, starting with the coming face to face with a demon possessed man.

Could the boat represent the travelling vessel that Jesus uses to get people from one place to another as quite frankly, most of us are happy to stay put and do what is comfortable for us. For some being comfortable may be doing dangerous things, but the uncomfortable come by not being able to be vulnerable in other ways. Still, I would hazard to say that most of us like status quo. Let Jesus take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee, as the old hymn goes, but we prefer that to really be on our own terms and in ways that we feel comfortable with rather than deal with any changes to our circumstances.

However, we all know that change is inevitable. We age, children leave home, we retire, we go to school, we lose friends, we make friends, we move, we lose a job or get a job, our partner leaves or dies and at times someone new is brought into our lives. Change happens even when we don't choose it. In the church we like things to stay the same, but the decline in churches speak pretty loudly to the fact that the way things were are not the way things are and so we are looking at the changes that need to happen for us to continue to be the hands and feet of God in an ever-changing world.

Recently I was reading an article by professor Karoline Lewis from Luther Seminary in Minneapolis in which she shared her thoughts regarding this scripture. She writes,

The promise of this text is...that there is something on the other side that Jesus knows about — and needs to get us to. Of course, the reality for the disciples, and for us, is that the other side is not all that rosy. It has its own set of challenges — the disciples have to see Jesus differently, themselves differently. It means living into a new reality. And that takes some getting used to. Because when your location changes so does your perspective and others' perspective of you. When your location changes, so do you. That's pretty much how change works.²

Now location does not have to be only physical, it can be how you locate yourself in the world spiritually, mentally, and socially as well. But changing how you locate yourself does change perspective and it takes some amount of courage. Years ago I read a particular book and the only thing that stuck with me from that were the words, "there can be no courage without fear." Change in our location or our perceptions generates fear, especially before they happen because unknowns are things we fear. As Karl Albrecht said, fear is an anxious feeling, caused by our anticipation of some imagined event or experience.³

This whole passage from Mark regarding this scene in the boat and the calming of the storm can be seen from a very individual perspective and there is much value in that, but let's note that in this story not one disciples is singled out. They are in the boat together getting from one side of the water to the other and Jesus is right there with them. It is also a way to imagine the church. We are together in this time of change, of finding that our location in the world has changed, but God is still with us. Jesus did not leave the boat and God has not left us. Still, just as the disciples had no idea what would greet them on the other side of the water, we are not sure of what we will experience in our own time.

Our world is experiencing tumultuous times, our church faces an unsure future, what has not changed is that God is still present and says to the storms around us, "Peace! Be still! And then turns to us to say, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" I could go on for quite some time delving into the story, but for now, can we trust that God is still capable of calming the wind and the sea of our circumstances and trust that God is with us. God knows that we will still have fear, God knows our humanity, but can the knowledge that God is with us give us courage to cross over to some new way of being in the world? To experience a new location, a new perspective?

² [Karoline Lewis. The Other Side - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#). Accessed February 23, 2024

³ [Karl Albrecht Ph.D. The \(Only\) 5 Fears We All Share | Psychology Today](#). Accessed February 6, 2024.

This sermon cannot end with a certainty. It ends with questions as we consider as individuals and as a church how God might be using some kind of vessel to bring us to new places of experience, understanding, and perspective. The vessel is whatever your boat or our boat is. It may be a person, place, or something else. Regardless, it will change you, you may fear it, yet it will transform you...us... in ways that we could not have imagined. And because it is God at work through the power of the Holy Spirit and the compassion of Christ, it will be worth it.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.