

PENT 8 2011 [PR14]

Matt. 14:22-33

The term "fear" plays prominently in the news every day. "Fear of debt crisis" or "fear of drought", "fear about unemployment". We live in a dangerous world full of tragedy, illness, uncertainty & death. And while we can get upset over the great tragedies going on in the world today, what really grabs us the most are the fears that we feel personally in our everyday life. Fear about our health, fear about our children as they grow up, fear about our future."

Fear is part of life in this world. Why? Because, much as you would like, life is not your possession. You hold life in an open hand, not a clenched fist. As Jesus said, "**Who of you by anxious toil can add one cubit to his span of life?**" Life can be snatched from you at any moment.

And in your more reflective moments you may even sense a malevolent force at work in this world and that we are pawns in its evil machinations. Martin Luther put it well in his great hymn when he said, "**For still our ancient foe, does seek to work us woe, With craft and dreadful might he arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal.**"

Psychologists say that we should deal with our fears in 4 steps.

1. Accept the fact that your fears are natural, everyone has them.
2. Analyze your fears. Are they real or imagined.
3. Understand the root of your fears. Do they come from your own personal insecurity or are they due to the abusive behavior of others.
4. Work to overcome them. Or as some would say, "Just get over it."

I read a sermon by a popular TV preacher on the issue of trouble. He has a "think positive, be happy" theology. His sermon suggested 6 ways to handle trouble:

1. Remember who you are.
2. Think positively.
3. Remember there are external causes to trouble.
4. Do what can be done.
5. Keep a sense of humor.
6. Keep a victorious self image.

Nothing wrong with that. And for many of the fears we face these steps may be helpful. But for the really big fears of life...loss of your job, breakdown of

marriage, life threatening illness or injury, death - these six steps are not all that helpful because they lack one vital thing. Power. They lack the power to change things. They lack the power to rescue you from circumstances beyond your control. What you really need to deal with your fears, when the fears are real and the danger is real, is not to understand the danger, not to analyze the danger, not to try to deal as best you can with the danger....No what you need is powerful help. What you need is for someone who is strong and powerful to rescue you.

Can you imagine Jesus saying to Peter as he was going down for the third time..."Well Peter, remember who you are, think positively, remember there are external causes, do what you can, keep your sense of humor and a victorious self image!"

Of course not! What Jesus did was to reach out and grab Peter and pull him up! What Peter needed was not a sermon but a savior! When you are drowning it matters little how many swimming classes are offered back in town...and it matters little how much life-saving equipment is available on shore...what matters is if someone comes to save you. Jesus does just that. He jumps in to save you from sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is what Xianity is all about. Xian faith is where the power lies. Christ Jesus is the rock on which you stand when the storms rage around you and threaten to sweep you away. Trusting in Jesus gives you the nerve to stare into the face of death and not be afraid for faith knows that Jesus will reach out to you even after death has struck you down. Faith looks to the power of God to save in Jesus. That is where you find the true power.

Jesus knew that Peter and the disciples were in trouble and so he came to them, not with 6 easy steps for self-help, but with his powerful assistance. When the storms of life rage around you then Jesus comes to you and grabs you and pulls you up. You can count on that and therefore have "no fear" for Faith casts out Fear! Does this mean being a Christian will mean a trouble-free life? Of course not. Christian face troubles of all kinds. The difference is that Christians are not paralyzed by life's misfortunes. Our faith sees us through. You don't know what the future holds, but you know who holds the future. Therefore you need not be afraid.

Faith and fear don't mix. They are like oil and water. What is there to fear when you have faith in God? Remember last Sunday's epistle lesson, "**Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Faith drives out fear. When Peter saw the wind and waves he sank. He took his eyes off Jesus. When

we take our eyes off Jesus we also sink into fears of this world. Oh, we might be able to buck-up our courage with the world's security for awhile. Money and power and possessions are things the world trades in that give us some form of security. But when these all are washed away, what then shall be our hope and stay? None of the world's securities are forever. The world's security is fickle and we are foolish to place our trust in it. As the hymn says, "[X is the solid rock on which we stand, all other ground is sinking sand.](#)"

Peter did OK walking on the water as long as he focused on Jesus. But the minute he took his eyes off Jesus he saw the wind and the waves and his fears returned and he started to sink. But he "cried for help" and Jesus saved him.

The text goes on to say the "[When they got into the boat the wind ceased. And those in the boat said, "Truly, you are the Son of God."](#) Faith sees the hand of God at work in any rescue from trouble of any kind. Those who have no faith see only blind chance and luck. The day will come to each and every one of you when you will find yourself sinking in the troubled waters of this life. The storm will sweep around you and you will be sinking fast. It is then that you can pray along with Peter, "[Lord save me.](#)" God hears that kind of prayer. I don't know if your circumstances will miraculously change but I do know that God hears your prayers. And I also know one more thing. That you don't need to be afraid, for Jesus is there ready to pull you up, even out of death, into eternal life. Thanks be to God. AMEN