

Sunday, March 19, 2017

Psalm 95 (814VU)

Mark 4:35-41

Fear of Circumstances

We continue our Lenten journey with our theme of “Freedom from Fear” and as stated two weeks ago, that in order to gain freedom from our fears, we need to name them. And today our focus is not just on fears in general but what the circumstances are or might be which cause us to be afraid. For a moment just think about the circumstances in which you have found yourself and you were genuinely afraid- fearful of your life. This might not be easy but since you are here, you have overcome that particular circumstance and remember it as a victory over what had occurred and since then you have expanded your natural responses to fearful situations in a different way and even opened your mind to ask questions of why, how things were possible and wondered maybe even with hope about what is to come.

Do you remember your first day of school—at any level? Jk, Gr 9, college/ university or in a new school? What were you afraid of- or were you at all? What about the first day you worked at a new job? There is anxiety and fear and nerves and stress all rolled into one. Yet you survived that day. We all realize that one of the most stressful weeks of the year is the first week of school—right after labour day- why? Because everyone is starting a new routine and there is fear of how to fit in, what is appropriate to say or not, who to talk with, or even whether what is worn is appropriate. But once the routine is established after the first week- every one gets into a normal routine of circumstance.

Yet we are afraid of those moments when we think and feel we cannot do anything to help ourselves.—even fight or flight reactions may not work under some circumstances. In the novel, Political Suicide by Michael Palmer the premise of this story is of a special unit of the US Marines who are specially trained to have no fear. As part of their daily training they drink a toxic chemical mix which causes their minds to still function but without reason. They recite “The colour of our drink is the color of courage. It is the colour of blood spilled in battle, the colour of fire that burns for freedom. For our mission. For valor. For justice. For our country. For God. For Mantis... whatever it takes.” This chemical mix enables them to function but when it comes to performing tasks they just do it- no questions asked because they have no fear at all. The novel itself is quite intrinsic in its details of fear tactics but as the book progresses the soldiers lose

themselves and their identity for the specific cause of one man who has political aspirations. It is a novel and yet much of the details invite the reader to wonder what it would be like to have no fear?

Fear is one of the most basic human emotions and like all emotions fear can be mild, medium or intense, depending upon the situation and the individual. It is programmed into the nervous system and works like an instinct. From the time we are infants we are equipped with the survival instincts necessary to respond with fear because there is a sense of danger of a feeling of being unsafe. Fear helps protect us. It makes us alert to danger and prepares us to deal with it. Feeling afraid is natural and helpful in some situations. Having fear can be like a warning, a signal that cautions us to be careful.

In our reading from Mark 4, Jesus has been teaching all day and in the evening he is tired. He says to the disciples. Let's go over to the other side of the lake. So leaving the crowd behind, they take Jesus into the boat. There are also other boats on the lake. Suddenly a furious squall / storm arises. The disciples are filled with fear because they are seeing waves crashing on their boat and drowning is a real possibility. They are besides themselves with worry and fear. They are afraid of the wind and the storm and the movement of the boat in the huge waves.

Jesus is at the back of the boat and he is not bothered by anything going on. He is exhausted and sleeping on a pillow. The disciples wake him up—probably not too gently or quietly. “Jesus—wake up Teacher, don't you care if we drown? “

Jesus seems to be a bit annoyed; as they have awakened him from his much needed sleep. He gets up. Stands in the boat, rebukes the wind and speaks to the waves. “Quiet! Be still”. The wind immediately dies down and the storm is over; the lake is completely calm. And what does Jesus say to the disciples? Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?

Jesus asks the disciples two questions. Why are you so afraid? And 2) Do you still have no faith? He asks, Why are you so afraid? Not just why are you scared/ afraid? But SO afraid?

Jesus saw in the eyes and body language of the disciples true fear—they believed that drowning was a real possibility. They thought that after the great day of teaching, Jesus would just rest and so would they. Had they checked with the Weather channel about pending storms

they might not have gone out on the lake in their fishing boats but the water was calm. Other boats were out on the lake as well. Jesus their teacher needed rest and they obliged his physical needs. And yet as the storm picked up and the winds were stronger they forgot something important. They forgot who was in the boat with them. They forgot who was with them riding the waves, experiencing the wrath of the wind, and just sleeping away from utter exhaustion. Jesus had been teaching parables and the people had listened hopefully understanding his words of hope, and faith. He also explained everything he taught to the disciples so that they fully comprehended his words and their meaning. The disciples forgot who was in the boat with them.

How many of us/ you have been facing difficult situations lately—sickness/ cancer treatments, losses- grieving over the death of loved ones, changes in family circumstances, separations, divorces, uncertainty of success or failure at school at the job site, working too many days, not enough hours, worrying about keeping a home, buying a home, illnesses of children, grandchildren (near and far),...? All of us face difficult situations and sometimes we lose faith in these times. We also forget who is in the boat with us? We get so caught up in these circumstances that we cannot see anything else. We cannot see Jesus resting and our need to call upon him. To wake him up and tell him we need his help, his guidance, his love, his support. Jesus reminds the disciples when he asks, “Why are you so afraid?” I’m right here. Jesus is near and we do not need to be afraid.

Jesus gets up and calms the storm happening all around them. Jesus is with you all the time- no matter what you are experiencing. We often forget this == he’s riding with you throughout your life—he’s in your boat, your car, your life—and he is not leaving. So you have nothing to fear!

The second question Jesus asks the disciples is “Do you still have no faith?” They still didn’t get who Jesus was/ is? They knew he was a great teacher and healer and maybe came from God. But they became terrified of Jesus because they thought he was something else- after all the winds and the waves obeyed him. Who was this Jesus? They were no longer afraid of the storm, but were terrified about the things Jesus could do. And this fear of the Lord is something altogether different. This fear of the lord is a statement which reflects the Old Testament theology where people were afraid of God- F, S and Spirit because God instilled this fear so that people of many generations would come to know God. To fear God is only the

beginning of understanding who God is. We need to read the rest of the story of God's love to truly know and accept Jesus. We must appreciate the fear of God first. For when we consider God we must describe God with awe, wonder, terror, dread, reverence and respect for God is holy, righteous and just; God is our creator and if we do not 'fear God' how can we truly appreciate what Jesus did for us—by being in the boat with us as well as dying on the cross?

God wants people to love him but to begin a loving relationships there needs to be reverence, honour and respect of who God is; just as God knows you as an individual. Having fear of God is to know that knowledge will follow and there will be understanding and love as this relationship grows. (Proverbs 1:7, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10) Ultimately, it comes down to perspective and position. Who is God and what is my./your perspective on God's nature, power and justice? Who am I and what is my human position relative to this Almighty God? For once you understand and accept the entire story- each of us can live our lives in a special appreciation of co-existing truths- fear and love of God.

Jesus asks the disciples, Do you still have no faith? What he was really asking is do you not understand that I am the Son of God? Believe in me; trust me, obey me. You have nothing to fear—I love you.

As we continue our Lenten journey let us be reminded of God's promise to us from Psalm 118:4 "Let those who fear the Lord say, "His love endures forever." And we also read from Revelation 14:7 that we are to "fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." Let us be reminded of us under all circumstances and remember Jesus is with you.