

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time
June 21, 2009
Fr. Tom Elliott

Calming Our Fears

Job 38:1, 8-11
Psalm 107
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41

Some fears are rational and some are not. I have a very rational fear of heights. I believe that if I fall from a dangerously high place I might get hurt or even killed. Therefore, I fear dangerously high places. Other fears, however, do not seem rational at all, such as optophobia—the fear of opening one’s eyes. Optophobia is on the “official” list of phobias that I saw on the internet. This makes me wonder—are there people who literally go and visit a psychologist for help with their optophobia? If so, how do they get to the psychologist’s office?!

Regardless of whether our fears make sense or not, Jesus desires for us to bring our fears to Him and grow in faith and trust. Our Gospel reading today reminds us of this fact by pointing out Jesus’ identity and power. First, the author of Mark reveals Jesus’ true identity as God and then He shows that Jesus has the power to calm our fears.

If I was going to explain Jesus’ power and identity in the form of a syllogism, it would go like this:

- ❖ God has power over creation
- ❖ Jesus has power over creation
- ❖ Jesus is God

We know that God has power over creation because there are numerous illustrations of His power in the Old Testament. One such example is found in Psalm 107, which reads—

In their distress they cried to the LORD,
who brought them out of their peril,
Hushed the storm to a murmur;
the waves of the sea were stilled.
They rejoiced that the sea grew calm,
that God brought them to the harbor they longed for.

-Psalm 107:28-30

Because of today’s Gospel story, we also know that Jesus has power over creation. By including the story of Jesus calming the storm, the author of the Gospel of Mark is making it very clear to all of his readers that Jesus Christ *is* God, equal to the Father. While the author wanted his readers to know that Jesus is God, he also wanted us to know that Jesus’ disciples did not yet realize Christ’s divinity. He showed this by writing, “The [disciples] were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?’” (Mark 4:41).

In addition to teaching us about the identity of Jesus Christ as God, this Gospel story also reveals Jesus' desire to heal our fears and lead us into greater faith and trust. It's important for us to realize that the *storm* is not the problem in the story. The real problem is the disciples' lack of faith and trust. If the *storm* had been the real problem, Jesus would have been disturbed by it Himself, but instead, we read that He was sleeping peacefully in the stern of the boat. What truly needed to be calmed was not the storm, but the disciples' fear. This is why Jesus told them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" (Mark 4:40). This is a *very* important message for us to hear!

Most of us experience fear on a pretty regular basis. It is extremely comforting to us to know that Jesus' calming voice is louder and more powerful than the voice of fear. Linda Schubert, in her book, True Confessions, gives an example of Christ's voice being louder and more powerful than the voice of fear. She writes—

Once when I was flying to the Philippines to speak at a conference, I was overcome with fear of failure. My mind was like a runaway horse. I said to myself, "Linda, You're old. You're fat. You're ugly. They will find out how much you don't know and you will go home in disgrace." God penetrated my fear, saying, "Rise up into who you are and fill the assignment I have given you!" Bolting upright, I exclaimed, "Yes, Lord!" The moment I obeyed, the grace was released.

-True Confessions, pg. 17

When you and I are overcome with fear, when we clearly hear its voice, Christ invites us to look toward Him instead of the storm, to trust Him instead of giving credence to the voice of fear. Rather than hoping that Christ will "fix" the cause of our fear, we simply have to have faith that He is with us. Like Linda, we have to take time to listen to Christ remind us of who we are—our identity. This is beautifully illustrated in Paul's letter to the Romans when he writes, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15). That is who we are—God's children, brothers and sisters of Christ, loved and cherished beyond our fears, called into a trust and faith that cannot be shaken!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Psalm 34:5 (NAB) "I sought the LORD, who answered me, delivered me from all my fears" and ask, "What are the fears that I need the Lord to deliver me from?" How has He answered my prayer for deliverance?
- ✚ Call to mind a time in your life when you were overcome with fear. What were you fearful of? What about that situation did you wish God would have changed? What about that situation did God desire to change? How did you find peace from the fear of that situation? What happens in your heart when you think about the peace that squelched the fear?