

When Fear Impacts Your Faith

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Hi everybody. By now you've heard the news that things are going to get worse before they get better. So needless to say, everybody in The United States of America and really, most of the world, are sitting up straight and paying attention. Fear has a way of doing that, doesn't it? And speaking of fear, as you may have noticed, there's a lot of talk about faith and fear, faith verses fear, choosing faith over fear, but what exactly does any of that mean, and what does it look like? Is it just wishful thinking, positive thinking?

For a lot of folks, faith is really just confidence that somehow it's all gonna work out in the end, but for Christians, faith is more than that, faith is more than keep your chin up, you know, we can do this. If Jesus is correct, and I always assume Jesus is correct, faith isn't even the opposite of fear. According to Jesus, faith is actually a version of fear, but Jesus didn't just talk about it, he actually illustrated it, and Peter gives us his version in the gospel of Mark.

Now, we all know this story, but I'm not sure we all get the point. According to Peter, Jesus and the 12 needed a break from the crowd, so they did what they normally did, they got in several boats and they took a journey across the southern end of The Sea of Galilee, when suddenly, a furious storm blows in. You remember this story, the waves were breaking over of bow of the boat, and before long, they realized they could not bail water fast enough!

And, well I'm sure most of these guys could swim, they knew they could not swim against the wind, and to swim with the wind would just take them further out to sea. So understandably, they were afraid. They were afraid because they had something to be afraid of. Meanwhile, and you'll remember this as well, Jesus was in one of the boats asleep on a cushion, or at least Peter thought so anyway. I'm not so sure he was really asleep, he may have been pretending after all, this was a set up to teach them something about faith and fear. And perhaps it was set up to teach us something about faith and fear as well.

Anyway, the disciples wake him up and they say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown? Don't you care if we drown"? Which sounds silly to us because Jesus was in the boat with them, but perhaps that's how you're feeling about right now. "God, don't you care if I drown? Don't you care if I can pay my bills? Don't you care if I can keep my job? Recover what I've lost? Don't you care if I can feed my family? Don't you care if I can ever retire, finish school, get married? God, don't you care if I stay married"? Then Jesus got up and he had a conversation with nature. He told the waves to quiet down, and they did.

And then he asked the disciples this question, it seemed like a silly question at the time, "Why"? "Why? Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Why are you so afraid? After all you've seen me do, after all we have experienced together, do you still have no faith"? To which he could have added, "Aww, I see what was happening here, you placed your faith in the storm". "You actually believed that storm determined your destiny".

Then, according to Peter, even after the storm subsided, they were not relieved. This is the most amazing part of the story, Peter says that after the storm subsided, they were terrified that literally they feared a great fear. They were more afraid after the storm subsided than they were during the storm. And they ask each other a question, a question they should have been asking all along, a question that, well, we should ask every single day. Here's the question they asked, "Who is this man? Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him". And the answer, he is a super man, he is the God man, he is the son of man, and in that moment, they realized that they had fear, or trusted in the wrong thing.

They suffered from misplaced fear, misplaced terror, and later, Jesus would come right out and state this plainly, he would say, "My friends", and I love the fact that he said friends, "My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more". In other words, "fear not, even when there is something to be afraid of. Fear not, not because it's all gonna work out fine, fear not because I care, I am with you. If you're going to fear something, if you're going to assume that your destiny is determined by something", Jesus said, "fear me, trust me".

So the moral of the story is simply this, that fear and faith are really two sides of the same coin. Will we put our faith in a global pandemic? Will we trust this pandemic to determine our destinies? Have we placed our confidence in a virus? Put it that way, it sounds kind of ridiculous, doesn't it? That was Jesus point, his question, "Why are you afraid"? Could be restated this way, "Why are you trusting in the storm? Why not trust me instead"?

Now, it took awhile, but Peter finally got it. About, I don't know, two years later, he and John are dragged in front of the high priest and the other religious leaders responsible for crucifying Jesus. And Peter and John had every reason to believe that they were next, that they would die that very day, but they had learned the lesson of the storm, and they knew better than to put their confidence, their faith, in the high priest and his cronies, which is exactly what the high priest assumed they would do, because, well that's what everybody did, but they were in for a surprise.

Luke tells us that when the high priest, and the men with him, saw the courage of Peter and John, they suddenly realized that these were just average day laborers, and they were astonished, they were astonished that they weren't afraid. The working class trembled in the presence of these men, but not Peter and John, why? Luke tells us, referring to the high priest and his allies, and I quote, "They were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus". And clearly, they were confident that Jesus was still with them, and Jesus is still with you.

And while it might feel like God has fallen asleep, he hasn't. Which means you can fall asleep every single night confident of this, he is in your boat. He said so, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, even when the wind and the waves are coming in strong". So, fear not, not because there is not something to be afraid of, fear not, because there's someone to fear even more. Someone who loves you too much to abandon you, someone who's grace and mercy will be sufficient for you right through this storm. The captain of your soul.

It's going to get worse before it gets better, so wash your hands, practice social distancing, pray for the sick, and pray specifically for the extraordinary men and women caring for the sick, but then, every single morning, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning it's shame, and then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and you will not lose heart".