

August 13, 2017
Proper 14A Christ
Church, Mexia

One Sunday morning the pastor noticed little Johnny was standing staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The young man of seven had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up and stood "Good morning pastor" replied the young man not taking his eyes off the plaque. "Sir, what is this?" Johnny asked.

"Well son, these are all the people who have died in the service", replied the pastor.

Soberly, they stood together staring up at the large plaque. Little Johnny's voice barely broke the silence when he asked quietly, "Which one sir, the 8:30 or the 10:30?"

All of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ, believers in the living God, know moments of stark terror in the course of our journey with the divine. One minute it's smooth sailing, the next, the storm is upon us. Suddenly we awaken from our blind acceptance of the status quo to the truth that we and our world are fragile, that life as we know it is not forever, and that we are not in control of very much. The disciples were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, three or four miles out from shore, after dark, in the middle of a rising storm. Now most of these guys were fishermen. They were used to the sudden bad storms on this Sea. It wasn't the storm that scared them. They were not really afraid until they saw Jesus walking on top of the waves. Then they were very afraid. The laws of nature were blown away in the wind and chaos was in their midst.

Perhaps they were thinking that they should not have left him alone. Certainly, they thought something had happened to him and that his angry ghost was coming after them. If you were in that little boat what would you have been feeling?

In C.S. Lewis's fairy tale, ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe***, three children enter into a wardrobe and come out into a world of talking animals and even stranger beings than that. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver welcome them into their home and explain that the land is held captive by an evil sorceress, but that they are hopeful that things will be changing soon. The true king, Aslan, is returning.

When Mr. Beaver explains that Aslan is a lion, Susan asks, "Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," says Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" asks Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver, "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Confrontation with the divine does send us reeling and deserves the respect of fear and knocking knees. I certainly would be terrified if I were rocking in a little boat and saw my friend and teacher walking across the water toward me. Surely it would mean the end of my world, and I would not at first find comfort in his presence, especially if I had not yet witnessed the resurrection and absorbed its meaning.

There are theories that say that chaos has its virtues, that without the experience of chaos, we do not heal, or find new life. Maybe so, but it's pretty hard to believe that when you're in the storm, being pummeled by the wind, worried your boat will be swamped, and threatened with drowning.

Jesus comes across the waves to tell us that we are more than the fears that we feel, even though the fear feels overwhelming. Jesus says you are more than cancer cells, more than a lost job, more than a dissolving marriage, more than grief over those separated from us. You are more than whatever fear has you in its clutches. As Jesus comes to us over the waves, he brings with him something much greater than the human mind can grasp.

With all our advancements in science and technology, as Jesus comes to us in the midst of the storm, we come to realize that he knows more than we have yet discovered. To echo Hamlet, there are many "more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," than are currently evidenced in our science. As G.K. Chesterton said,

"We do not know enough about the unknown even to know that it is unknowable." It seems our God wants us to understand that the way out of fear is not control, for we will never control anything. The way out of fear is release of control and trust in God. There is our only hope, and you're hearing that from a control FREAK.

When we hear the Holy One's voice saying, "It is I, do not be afraid", we are afraid. We drop to our knees. For God is not safe, but God is good. This great God of the unknowable, doesn't always calm the storm right away, or stop the cancer, or provide the money we need, but this great God of the unknowable, this very present God does calm the heart.

Author Stephen Covey tells of spending an evening with his two sons. They did a variety of things, ending up watching a movie together. 4 year old Sean fell asleep during the movie, and when it was over Covey picked him up in his arms, carried him to the car, and laid him the back seat. It was very cold that evening, so Covey took of his coat and gently arranged it around the boy.

Later that evening, it came time to tuck in the other boy, 6 year old Stephen. Covey tried to talk to him about their time together, to find out what he had liked the most. But the boy refused to respond. Suddenly, Stephen turned over on his side, faced the wall, and began to cry. "What's wrong honey? What is it?" Covey asked. The boy turned back, chin quivering, eyes wet. "Daddy", he asked, "if I was cold, would you put your coat around me too?"

Our great and unknowable God knows that we are always a little cold, and at least a bit afraid. But hope and fear are closely related. Both are responses to an unknown future. Fear is based on uncertainty and the belief that we cannot survive what we face. Hope has a basis for certainty. Our hope comes from trusting that God is here and is unendingly in love with us. Fear, the flip side of hope, results from not trusting that God's love and power will unfailingly come through even when we do not. God is calling us to trust and hope in God's constant presence and love in the face of all our fear and pain. The storm may rage on, the disease may continue to ravage, and the marriage may not come back together, but even so, God is with us, and there is hope, and there is an eternity of new beginnings.

Receive the words of Jesus Christ, the one who walked on water. Believe him when he says, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."