

Pentecost 6 / June 30, 2024

Mark 5:36

“Do not fear, only believe.”

The theme of faith and fear runs through the scriptures like a golden thread. God calls Moses to return to Egypt, confront Pharaoh and tell him, “Let my people go!” Moses is afraid to go, makes excuses and finally says, “Send someone else.” Despite his fears, Moses goes trusting the word of the Lord and the power of His promise. A man appealed to Jesus’ disciples to release his son who was in bondage to an unclean spirit. The disciples were unsuccessful. Jesus comes, the man appeals to Him. Jesus attributes the problem to lack of faith. He says “All things are possible to him who believes.” The man confesses both faith and fear, saying, “I believe, help my unbelief.” Jesus appeared to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee after His resurrection. The evangelist says, “the disciples rejoiced to see the Lord, but then he adds “But some doubted.” Faith and doubt, faith and fear, are part of life in this fallen world, including our lives in the Lord. In and through it all Jesus speaks His word of reassurance, saying, “Do not fear, only believe.”

Some people think faith is having no fear. Others say if we had no fear, we would have no need for faith. The woman in our gospel came to Jesus with her fears. Don’t let your fears prevent you from coming to Jesus. Her fear focused her faith on Jesus. She reached out and touched Him. When Jesus called for the person who touched Him to come forward, she came with fear and trembling, fell at His feet and told Him the whole truth. Jesus blessed her faith with salvation, saying literally, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be healed of your disease.” Jesus held her up as an example of faith. Faith saves because faith receives the healing of God in Christ Jesus.

Many people came to Jesus without fear and without faith. They weren’t afraid to judge Him, or to challenge Him with hard questions, trying to catch Him in His words. They were bold to accuse Him of violating the sanctity of the Sabbath. This woman’s fear showed her faith. In Proverbs it says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” She knew He was the Holy One of God, so she feared in His presence. She knew He could help her with healing. With fear and trembling, she reached out in faith and received the Lord’s healing. Faith is coming to Jesus with our fears. Faith is casting our fears on Him, knowing He has power to save us. Faith is believing He cares for us. Jesus says, “Do not fear, only believe!”

What are your greatest fears? Death is a big fear. The will to live is intrinsic to life. Animals don’t want to be killed. They’ll fight to stay alive. Insects don’t want to be killed. A man tried to destroy a wasp’s nest by spraying them with poison. It’s best to do that at night when they are dormant. It was day time. He got quite a few wasp bites. They just didn’t want to die. In fact, he observed, “They were really mean!” Most people want to live. I read a Greek Play in which the main character makes a deal with death to spare his wife, if he can find someone to volunteer as a substitute. His parents were old and he figured one of them would happily take his wife’s place, since they wouldn’t live much longer anyway. He was surprised when they refused, saying, ‘long or short, life is sweet and death is bitter.’ It’s one thing to speculate as to what we might do when faced with death. It’s something completely different when we are truly faced with the limits of our mortality. Acknowledged or not, death is our greatest fear.

In our text a synagogue leader named Jairus approaches Jesus to help his daughter, who is at the point of death. The death he fears is not his own, but his daughter’s. Sometimes we fear the death of others more than we fear our own death. The fear of living without someone dear to us can be overwhelming. Synagogue leaders didn’t generally like Jesus. They saw Him as a hostile intruder. He gave sermons about grace, which they felt gave people licence to violate the law. He violated the law, in their opinion, by deliberately and intentionally, healing people on the Sabbath. This man must have been desperate with fear to seek out Jesus and ask for his help. In this case fear was a good thing. The fear of the death of his daughter drove him to Jesus. Don’t let your fears keep you from Jesus. Come to Jesus with your fears. He calls, “Come to me and I will give you rest!” He calls us to Himself that He might take away our fears in forgiveness, faith and salvation.

Jesus had a contentious relationship with synagogue rulers, many of whom were Pharisees; another group to whom He spoke hard words. The Pharisees seem to be the bad guys of the New Testament. They had their faults and Jesus wasn’t afraid to address them. Jesus spoke the truth to them, but He spoke it in love. He reached out to them, just as He reached out to everyone else. Jesus doesn’t turn anyone away when we come to Him with our needs. Jesus went with the synagogue ruler to help his daughter. He calls us to come to Him no matter who we are or what we have done. He calls and when we come, He opens His arms to receive us.

Jesus went with him, but then suddenly Jesus stopped and exclaimed, "Someone touched me." Worse yet, a woman stepped forward and He engaged her in conversation as precious time was slipping away. Then people came and told him the news he dreaded, that his daughter was dead. The sum of all his fears had come upon him. He felt the pain of Job who cried, "The thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me." They said "Why bother the teacher any further." Nothing more could be done. She was beyond human help and healing. But Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe." Jesus walked with him in his fears to his house and his daughter's bedside. Jesus walks with us in our fears. His words empower us with faith and give us hope on the way.

When they came into the house and saw the young girl dead, Jesus comforted Jairus, saying, "The child is not dead but sleeping." Sometimes people use the term 'sleeping' as a euphemism to soften the harshness of death. Our loved one did not die, they fell asleep. It seems less harsh to say someone is sleeping than to say they are dead. Jesus was not being euphemistic. He said this to express His divine being and His power over death, which in a moment, He would demonstrate by calling the girl to arise. Death is strong. Jesus is stronger. His words have the power of life over death He is the resurrection and the life. He has the words of eternal life. When Jesus speaks death obeys. His words give us faith to believe in every circumstance of life, especially in the presence of death. He says, "Do not fear, only believe." His words calm our hearts unrest. His words give us hope and confidence in all things, even in the fear of death.

Jesus healed the woman with chronic bleeding and called a child to return from death, so we would know He is Lord and believe in Him as our God and Saviour. Jesus did these things, not so we would have no fears, but so we would come to Him with our fears, hear and receive the comfort of His words. He did these things as signs for what He will do for us and for all believers on the day of His return. On that great and glorious day, He will call us to rise from the sleep of death. He will heal us from the sickness of sin. He will give us a share in His resurrection to life eternal. As we await that day, we rest in His peace. We come to Him with our fears. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will live even though he dies." He calls to us all, saying, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." We rest in the power and promise of His words, "Do not fear, only believe."

In Jesus' Name. Amen