

This story in Matthew captures the relationship between FEAR and FAITH. The temptation might be to read this story as simple as: "The disciples were afraid. Who wouldn't be in a boat in the middle of a storm? They turn to Jesus and like he always does, he tells them to calm down and saves them." However, this story is rich with meaning and power. This story digs deep and reaches wide. And when it comes to the relationship between FEAR and FAITH, I would argue it is anything but simple. What meaning and power do we encounter? Let's dig and reach a little and see what we can uncover.

Why were the disciples afraid? Wind, waves? Some of them were fisherman, so surely, they had dealt with some wind and waves before. This was different. So different, it required a word in the Greek, *Seismos*, meaning a quake, a trembling eruption of sea and sky. While the disciples were at sea, there was a *seismos* that shook the disciples to the core. An interesting textual note about the word *seismos*. There are only two other uses of this word in Matthew, and they create a trilogy of great shake ups. The other two are Matthew 27:51-54 to describe Jesus' death and Matthew 28:2 to describe the stone rolling away at Jesus' resurrection. A *seismos* fear is one we can't forget, can't let go of. *Seismos* is to the core.

Expectation: What do we expect the story line to be? Jesus says he is getting in the boat to cross over and the disciples follow him as they had before. What do they think is going to happen? What we might anticipate reading is "Jesus gets into the boat. His followers went with him and a great rainbow appears in the sky, and doves flock overhead, and a sea of glass appears before them on the horizon." Because Christ is with them, we don't expect *seismos*. Introduces the question for us, "Have we come to think that as long as Christ is there the rest is smooth sailing?"

That is not true though. Christ followers can experience and encounter *seismos*. Max Lucado in his book *Fearless* writes about what we might be experiencing. And although he writes this in 2009, much hasn't changed.

"They're talking layoffs at work, slowdowns in the economy, flareups in the Middle East, turnovers at headquarters, downturns in the housing market, upswings in global warming, breakouts of al Qaeda cells. Some demented dictator is collecting nuclear warheads the way others collect fine wines. A strain of swine flu (Covid) is crossing the border. The plague of our day, terrorism, begins with the word terror. News programs disgorge enough hand-wringing information to warrant an advisory: "Caution: this news report is best viewed in the confines of an underground vault in Iceland." We fear being sued, finishing last, going broke; we fear the mole on the back, the new kid on the block (and not the boy band from the 90's), the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. We sophisticate investment plans, create elaborate security systems, and legislate

stronger military, yet we depend on mood altering drugs more than any other generation in history.” (pg. 4-5)

What are some of your *seismos* fears? Time slipping away. Letting others down. Letting yourself down. Letting God down. Death. Not enough money at home. Not enough money at church. Loneliness. Companionship. What’s next. Good grades. Job security. A phone call with bad news on the other end of the line. Making the team. Making Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa proud. Being prepared. Friendships.

*There is a story of a young man in college who has his dreams and life before him. Step by step things are falling into place. School is good. Friends are good. His athletic career is great. He is leading a bible study with FCA. His dream was to become a professional and if everything in the upcoming season works out like he has planned, he might be able to bypass his senior season and declare for the draft. Until one morning mid-season when the lights flickered in his life, and he couldn’t walk. Why? No one knew. His trainer was a blessing, very knowledgeable and took the right steps. His coach was good at baseball and coaching but not a doctor. All he wanted to do was play, so whatever he could do in therapy is what he would do. Without really knowing, the trainer began throwing darts in the dark, and none hit the target. An MRI even came back inconclusive. What now? No news. No progress. Only more questions and more pain. All the young man thought was that his athletic life was crumbling around him. But it wasn’t just athletics. To him at the time, his athletic life meant his whole life. It was about a month when a sit down with the trainer and coach had him in the car to see a specialist. He would meet his parents there without really even knowing why. What could it possibly be that I am having to miss being with my teammates on the field today? Maybe even more simply, what could it possibly be that a young man in the best shape of his life can’t even climb a flight of stairs easily? Could it be...?*

*Sitting in a cramped room with the walls closing in, a doctor walks in, introduces himself and simply says, “Good news, it is not cancer! It is only broken!” The young man could see the doctor’s credentials on the wall, so it wasn’t hard to trust him. Wait a minute, what?*

*“Son, you don’t have cancer. The way the MRI presented, we needed to confirm whether what you have been experiencing with your leg wasn’t being caused by a type of incurable bone cancer. If so, we would be having a very different conversation right now about your life and what lies ahead. Instead, what we do know is that your tibia is broken, and we know what we need to do.”*

The young man in this story is me. I get it. FEAR shakes.

*Side note: Do you want to know what I asked the doctor next? I am not kidding. The very next words out of my mouth were, “When can I play again? Can I play on it?”*

Our fears are real. FEAR is a real power with affect! And when FEAR shakes, *seismos*, we must work in caution not to allow our fears to “take a hundred-year lease on the building next door and set up shop,” or “become the bully in the hallway at school: brash, loud, unproductive,” or “overshadow our faith.”

What did the disciples do in their fear? Turned to Jesus? Asked for help? Begged to be saved? Yes. The tone of their approach to Jesus helps us dig and reach and understand further.

What they did was question who Jesus is! “Do you not care.” You are over there sleeping while we panic and perish. They don’t ask about Jesus’ strength, “Can you calm the storm?” They don’t ask about Jesus’ knowledge or experience, “Do you have any experience with storms like this?” They doubt Jesus. When FEAR shakes, we are filled with doubt: of who Jesus is, where Jesus is, what Jesus is doing, God’s very existence and all the things we thought were good in this world.

- A. Fear causes a corrosion of confidence in God (Lucado pg. 9)- We can begin to wonder if love lives in heaven. Does God even care? And this doubt can lead us to anger. And our anger turns us into control freaks, “If you won’t, then I will.” When we feel cornered we begin to fight and claw with any means we can muster and they are usually not good repercussions.
- B. Fear deadens our recollection (Lucado pg. 10)- The disciples had reason to trust Jesus. By now they had witnessed him heal people and do things to warrant a pretty darn good track record. Fear creates a form of spiritual amnesia. It dulls our miracle memory.
- C. Fear causes feelings of dread (Lucado pg. 10)... Who likes to feel dreadful? It sucks the life out of the soul, curls us into an embryonic state, and drains us dry of contentment. When FEAR shakes, safety becomes our god, and when safety becomes our god, we worship the risk-free life. When we are fear-filled we are not able to love deeply. Love is risky. When we are fear-filled, we will not give to others in need. Benevolence has no guarantee of return. When we are fear-filled, we cannot dream wildly. It is already too much to do what we have to do today.

No wonder Jesus wages war against FEAR. Jesus stands before them and says, “Take courage. Have heart. Where is your faith?”

- D. Fear is also a little good (Lucado pg. 12)... Revere, Reliance, Warning- A dose of fear keeps a child from running across a busy street or a youth/ adult from smoking a pack of cigarettes or drinking. Fear is the appropriate reaction to a burning building or angry wild animal. Several times in scripture we are reminded to be “God fearing.” That is not to say we are to be afraid of God, but to respect and revere God so highly that God is above all else. Fear itself is not a sin. But when FEAR shakes, we can be lead to sin.

When FEAR shakes, may FAITH shine. We are going to talk more in-depth next week about “When FAITH Shines” but for now, I want to close with a few notes about FAITH.

We are anything but alone in our *seismos* circumstances. Christ is there! And not only is Christ there, but Christ is also able to stand before us and say, “Take courage. Have heart. Where is your faith?” Christ is able to withstand the *seismos* and tell it “Be still.”

God with us, Jesus the Christ, does not promise or guarantee the waves and winds and walls won’t shake rattle and roll. What do we need then? When FEAR shakes, may FAITH shine. We need FAITH! FAITH in God’s promises and provisions. FAITH in Jesus’ presence and possibilities. FAITH in the Spirit’s power and particularities. FAITH empowers us to know that FEAR is not the only reality.

FAITH is the beacon able to shine regardless of the *seismos*.

FAITH is what grounds us in assurance that our FEARS don’t have to rule us or control us.

FAITH is what provides us with a better choice toward living life more fully and freely.

FAITH is not proven only in the absence of FEAR.

FAITH is the power that encourages us to stand in the face of FEAR and say, “My God is stronger than your god. My God is higher than your god. My God is everything more than your god.”

Here is my prayer for us today: When FEAR shakes, and it will, may FAITH shine!!!