

**Sermon for June 21, 2015**  
**Mark 4:35-41**

Fears, we all have them. My biggest fear is a fear of heights. One of the reasons I stacked hay bales on the wagon was because I could only climb up so high in the hay mow. I don't go above the third rung on a ladder and flying in an airplane—no way! Next in line is a fear of snakes and spiders. Some of you may have the same fears and these are pretty common ones.

We may also have other fears in common: the fear of losing our health and having to rely on someone to take care of us; the fear of not having enough money for retirement; the fear of losing our loved ones and even the fear of our own death.

In our Gospel reading today the first question that Jesus asks the disciples is, "Why are you afraid?" That got me to thinking; some of his disciples are experienced fishermen, who knew the Sea of Galilee and the dangers of being in a storm. After all of their efforts to keep the boat afloat; it was beginning to sink and swimming to shore wasn't an option. They knew that their chances of living through this in open water in those conditions were not good.

So it makes me think that his question wasn't asking about the obvious conditions going on around them. In his next question he asks, "Have you still no faith?" It looks to me like the question Jesus is really asking is about their faith. One of the main themes running through the Gospels is that despite everything that the disciples have seen Jesus do—all of his teaching, preaching, casting out of demons and healing—they lacked faith. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark they never are described as having faith.

It seems just a little bit ironic that the ones who were closest to Jesus struggled just like everyone else to trust in him when they were confronted with something that they didn't understand or that made them fearful. Each time they were willing to let go of their faith.

The same questions that Jesus asked his disciples could be asked of us. Why are we afraid? Now I'm not talking about obvious situations in our lives—it's healthy to have a fear of tornados, raging flood waters, blinding blizzards and poisonous snakes. But it is one thing for us to feel fear and it's another to live in fear. Too often we turn fear into something that moves in and takes over our lives.

When we give fear that much power in our lives; we cling to whatever we fear losing and hang on for dear life! We will do anything not to lose what we most fear losing. We try to control what can't be controlled and hold onto what can't be held. And when things don't go the way we want them to; we become selfish, angry and bitter. So looking closer at Jesus' question I think it gets to our tendency to obsess about the things we fear to the extent that fear takes over our lives.

But his other question can help us here as well. Have we still no faith? We need to look at faith as not what we believe and know in our minds, but as our ability to trust in God no matter what happens. We say that we believe that God is a God of love and loves us unconditionally as sons and daughters. Our biggest challenge is to be able to entrust ourselves, our loved ones, our hopes and dreams into the care of this loving God; especially when we are afraid.

To do this we must be able to let go of whatever we are afraid to lose—our health, our financial security, our relationships, and our very life. If the heart of fear is trying to control, then the heart of faith is letting go. When we can let go, we find the peace that passes all understanding and even find joy replacing the fear. To do this isn't easy; we need to look beneath the fear and see the hand of the one who is holding us up in mercy and grace—even when the world around us is so frightening. It's something we have to do day by day and sometimes moment by moment.

Faith is not a get out of jail free card or a magic charm that protects us from pain and loss or suffering. Faith is trust—trust in God. A God about whom Moses tells the Israelites, “Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; God will not fail you or forsake you.” When the bad things happen our faith in the one who holds us keeps us from going under.

I want to close today with the following poem to help us when the storms of this life threaten to overwhelm us:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there were one set of footprints. This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat; I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, “You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there have only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, you have not been there for me?” The Lord replied, “The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand, is when I carried you.” by Mary Stevenson