

Three Kinds of Fear

Fear of Natural Things; Fear that God does not Care; Fear of the Numinous

Mark 4:35-41

Halifax: 30 June 2019

Introduction

In our sermon series on the gospel of Mark, we have come to a portion of Mark where there are several passages that emphasise the sovereign authority of Christ.

- These accounts speak of those who find themselves in the presence of Christ in awe before Him.
 - They realise that though He is clothed with flesh, they are actually in the presence of the numinous—that which is holy-other—that which they cannot control.
 - His presence sends a chill through you and makes you tremble in awe.
- This is especially the case in the first passage that we come to in this section today—the one about Jesus calming the storm.

Please give careful attention as a read it to you, for this is in fact the word of God and, whether we realise it or not, we are indeed before the numinous.

Mark 4:35-41: On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.”³⁶ Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him.³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.³⁸ But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher,

do You not care that we are perishing?”³⁹ Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.⁴⁰ But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How *is it* that you have no faith?”⁴¹ And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy word.

In looking at this passage, there are three responses of the disciples that we might call “fear,” but they are very different from each other.

- I am going to call them:
 - The fear of natural things, such as arises from the storm;
 - The fear that the Lord does not care, when we feel that He is not willing to help us;
 - The fear of the numinous, such as arises when we sense that we are in the presence of the Holy One.

We will look at each of these in turn.

- Let’s begin.

I. The fear of natural things—like a storm at sea.

A. We know that the disciples of Jesus were afraid in the storm because of Jesus’ questions in verse 40: **“Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?”**

1. These questions might have seemed to the disciples as the questions of someone who was out of touch with reality.

- They were experienced fisherman.
 - They knew the dangers of this sea.
 - No doubt they knew of many men who had lost their lives in storms like this one on this sea.
2. Surely they had good reason to be afraid.
- Consider the situation.
 - Jesus had been preaching all day from their boat to the great multitude on the shore—telling them parables.
 - As evening came on, He was exhausted and asked His disciples to take Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.
 - No doubt, if He had come to shore, He would have been swarmed by the multitude, so Mark tells us that “they took Him along in the boat as He was,” perhaps, “as He was already in the boat.”
 - The comment is made that there were other little boats that were with Him—clearly the story reads as originally told by an eyewitness.
 - Mark continues with his vivid style that brings us into the story—verse 37: **And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.**
 - The Sea of Galilee is subject to such storms.
 - Hiebert says,
 - “Such sudden, furious storms of hurricane proportions were characteristic of the lake, which lies 628 feet below sea level. These storms often swept down on the sea through the deep gaps in the highlands surrounding the lake. The deep ravines served as gigantic funnels to draw the wind down upon the waters. For a boat to capsize in such a storm meant sure death.”
 - And you see the circumstances—the waves were filling the boat.
 - This was no imagined danger.
 - This was the dread of every fisherman and every boatman that knew this lake.
3. You all have things that you fear too...
- a. There are those fears that are not quite as rational—you know they aren’t—but you still have them.
 - 1) Perhaps that you will say the wrong thing and make a fool of yourself.
 - 2) Or maybe you are afraid of elevators or of heights or confined spaces.
 - 3) Maybe you don’t like to visit other people because you are afraid that they won’t like you.
 - 4) Perhaps you are one of those people who is always afraid that you will make the wrong decision or that you forgot to turn off the stove.
 - b. There are also many things you may fear that are real threats—things that could easily happen and bring harm to you.
 - 1) That you or someone in your family might be diagnosed with a terminal illness—perhaps one that will bring terrible suffering with it.

- 2) Or perhaps you have a shaky job and you wonder if you will lose it... and maybe you don't know how you would support your family.
- 3) Perhaps you fear the collapse of our economy—how can we keep piling up debt and expect to continue?
- 4) Many believers see the rise of persecution and that makes them afraid.
- 5) Maybe you fear the anger or the disapproval of your spouse—maybe it is something that is an everyday occurrence—so of course you fear it.

TRANS> These are real dangers. They are things like storm that could easily happen.

B. How is it that Jesus seems to reproach us all for our fears when He says, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” to His disciples here?

1. Yet, there is clearly disapproval in Jesus' questions.
 - He doesn't think they ought to be so afraid, even though they were in circumstances in which many had gone under the sea.
 - It would be one thing if there fear was of something unrealistic or harmless, but it was not. It was of something that takes lives.
 - We know that Jesus is not irrational.
 - We know that He is not out of touch with the danger they were facing.
 - So how is that He reproaches them (and all of us) with these questions?
2. He reproaches His disciples and all of us because we are the ones who are out of touch with reality.
 - a. We are the ones who do not see the whole picture.
 - We do not see what is invisible, yet more real than what we do see.
 - Faith involves seeing God who is invisible, not with our eyes, but with our understanding that teaches us that He is in all things.
 - In our little boat tossing in the sea, we do not see that God is there because we have no faith.
 - We do not see Him who is invisible because, at least in that moment of danger, we have forgotten Him.
 - We do not see that if He were not sustaining us at every moment, whether there is a storm or no storm, we would all perish.
 - Our boat never floats, storm or no storm, unless He holds it up.
 - b. I read the story of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6 because it illustrates this so well when the Syrians surround Elisha and his servant and his servant is afraid...
 - But Elisha asks God to open his servant's eyes, and when God does, the servant sees a huge army of angels that are there protecting him and his master.
 - When he sees the invisible protection of God, it changes his whole perspective.
 - he realises that it was not Elisha who was not aware of what was going on... he, the servant, was the one who did not grasp the reality of the situation.

3. Fear is something we all need to be challenged about today—because we live in a society that is very indulgent about fear.
 - a. We are not very tolerant of anger, but we are extremely tolerant about fear.
 - We would rarely reproach anyone for being afraid (as Jesus does here), but we would be quick to reproach them for anger.
 - There are other societies that would be just the opposite—and they are societies that don't have so many people paralysed by fear; but they have more anger.
 - Of course we should not be accepting of either sinful fear or sinful anger.
 - If Jesus had seen His disciples full of anger, He would have asked them why they were so angry.
 - b. And I tell you, if you are afraid of bad things that might happen to you, you need to realise that there is sin in that fear.
 - You might get mad at me for saying it, but it is true.
 - I have to say it to myself too because I also have many sinful fears.
 - And the Bible tells us plainly to be anxious for nothing.
 - It shows a lack of proper trust in God.
 - The problem is that we forget that we are here by God and for God.
 - If the day comes that He has appointed for you to die, that is His prerogative—your life belongs to Him.
 - If a day (or many days) come in which He has appointed hardship or suffering for you or those you love, embrace it as His will.
 - Not that we should be indifferent about suffering and hardship. It is right for us to pray for its removal if it is God's will.
 - We are not to go looking for trouble or to be indifferent about it.
 - There is nothing wrong with steering out of harm's way or trying to prevent a disaster as long as our steering doesn't involve sin...
 - such as the times when I have refused to speak at a meeting because I was afraid.
 - c. When we are so fearful, like the disciples were, we have lost sight of the hand of God in the world.
 - We are looking at the things that are happening to us as random instead of looking at them as sent from the hand of God... with His purpose.
 - Inappropriate fear goes away when we see that God is in control.
 - I am not suggesting that this is easy—but that is the reason we have a Saviour.
 - There is forgiveness with Him as we struggle with sin.
 - There is always room to grow.
 - Even Paul said that he had not yet attained.

TRANS> So that is the fear of natural things.

- Now let's look at the second kind of fear that is addressed in this passage.

II. The fear that God does not care

A. The disciples ask Jesus, “Do you not care?”

1. In the midst of their ordeal...
 - As the wind is howling and as one wave after another crashes into their boat and begins to fill it up,
 - They look to Jesus for help and find that He is fast asleep.
 - He had been teaching all day and was surely exhausted, so He has crawled under the deck and is sleeping soundly on a mattress.
 - They wake Him up and they say (vs. 38), **“Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”**
 2. That is one of our greatest fears when we are in trouble.
 - We are afraid that the LORD does not care.
 - Can He not see that we are in danger? Why doesn't He do something?
 - Perhaps you have chronic pain,
 - perhaps you have lost your job,
 - perhaps you have been diagnosed with serious illness,
 - maybe your marriage is falling apart,
 - maybe there is trouble with your children,
 - maybe you have a relative or someone at work that keeps on causing you grief.
 - There are millions of things that we could name...
 - But what makes it so hard to bear, especially if you are a believer, is the thought that God knows about it all and does not do anything to stop it.
 - He doesn't even seem to care.
 - There are a lot of people who reject God in bitterness because of the suffering in the world that God supposedly knows about, but does not stop.
 - “Lord, do you not care?”
 - I am sure you have all asked this question before—in your heart and probably with your lips...
- B. But what an inappropriate question to ask the Lord Jesus...
- Think of it—**“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?!”**
1. Here was the One who left the glory of heaven in order to become human flesh and to die on the cross that we might not perish.
 - What a thing to say to Him! **“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”**
 - He cares more than any of His disciples cared about each other and more than any of you care about anyone else.
 - You say, “But I would intervene and stop their suffering if I could,” and no doubt you would; but what if that would only add to their problem.
 - What if they needed the struggle to draw them to God, to see their need of Him, to awaken them to Him?
 - What if the thing they needed most was for you to suffer the pains of hell for them instead of to relieve them of this or that problem?
 - Would you care enough to go to hell and be punished for their sins?
 - Do you think you would be willing to do that if you had no sins, or do that for sins you did not commit—like abusing a child or something?

- Jesus cared more than the disciples knew,
 - for they did not yet know the cross.
 - And He also cares much more than we know, because we do not understand that depth of what He did on the cross or of the rescue He brought to us.
- It seems rather insulting to ask Him if He cares!
- 2. It brings up His question again, “How is it that you have no faith?”
 - a. Faith not only sees the hand of God acting in all things, as we considered already... it also sees the goodness of God.
 - Faith believes that God is a gracious God who is committed to His people.
 - It does not accept the lie of Satan that God is trying to withhold something that would be good for us to have.
 - It believes not only that God is, but, as Hebrews 11 says, that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.
 - It has seen that the Lord is merciful and gracious.
 - b. But why does faith believe that He cares when it sees suffering?
 - 1) Many people have a wrong understanding of faith.
 - For them, you just believe that good will come and your believing it makes it happen.
 - And if you are religious, you put God into the picture and you believe that He will do what you want—and your faith sort of forces His hand to act.
 - It is like a force that you can use to get God to do stuff as long as you can just believe enough.
 - That is so wrong.
 - 2) Faith is rather believing what God has promised.
 - It is believing His covenant promise that He will be our God and that He will bless us if we diligently seek Him.
 - It is believing His promise that if we love Him and are called according to His purpose, He works all things together for good.
 - We may drown at sea, but if we do, we know that He did it for our own good.
 - We may be suffering chronic pain, but we know that He is doing it for our good and His glory.
 - We know that, not because we just know it, but because that is what He has promised to us if we are in Christ and we believe what He has said—that is what faith does.
 - 3) Faith is also believing that God has done what He says He has done.
 - That He truly has sent His Son and that His Son truly has been made an offering for our sin.
 - That He has truly cared for us in remarkably gracious ways.
 - That He has indeed been with us in all of our troubles.

- C. So what should you do when you are in a situation where you do not see His care?
1. You should indeed cry out to Him for mercy.
 - The disciples of Jesus do that in their little boat.
 - They are right to go to their Master and to bring the matter before Him.
 - God has commanded us to pray, and we have access to Him through Jesus.
 2. And we may ask God the question in our troubles, as even our Lord did, “Why have you forsaken Me?”
 - We have that question in Psalm 22 where we have by prophecy the words that Christ spoke from the cross.
 - a. It may be that He has forsaken us for a time to chasten us.
 - He did forsake Jesus for a time when He chastened Him for our sins.
 - And He, in a sense, forsook His people when He sent their enemies upon them and cast them out of the land because of their sin
 - But Jesus did not cry out in unbelief in Psalm 22. Just the opposite.
 - b. But if we cry out in unbelief, as the disciples did in this boat,
 - we can expect a rebuke from Him: **“How is it that you have no faith?”**
 - This storm was the hand of God.
 - It was sent by Him to bring about His purposes in these disciples.
 3. Be sure to do as our Lord did in Psalm 22 and remember how gracious He is.
 - a. Remember how He has cared for His people in the past...
 - How He has delivered them and stood with them...
 - How He has delivered you and stood with you...
 - And how He has redeemed us and promised us blessing and mercy.
 - He will not allow us to suffer to no purpose.
 - Sin must be purged—we must be refined and purified.
 - We must learn to depend on Him and to trust Him.
 - We must be willing to surrender all for His glory.
 - b. And remember what He has promised in His covenant...
 - That He will deliver us if we come to Him in Jesus’ name.
 - That He is working all things for good in our lives.
 - That we should count it all joy when we fall into various trials and difficulties because they will produce patience and love for God in us.
 - And most of all, we will come to know Him as we have not known Him before, through our troubles.

TRANS> And that brings us to the third kind of fear.

III. The fear of the numinous (the divine presence).

- A. The outcome of this ordeal for the disciples was an encounter with the numinous—
1. They came to see that with Jesus, they were in the presence of divinity.
 - They saw that there was much more to Jesus than they had yet realised.
 - They had seen Him cast out demons and they had seen Him heal the sick, but now He had hushed a storm with a mere word.
 - This was beyond all! They were in the presence of the divine!

2. I don't think they got what they expected when they cried out to Him.
 - They knew He had power to work miracles, but they likely expected Him to protect them from the storm somehow.
 - Perhaps He would keep their boat from sinking or breaking up.
 - Or maybe He would send His angels to carry them to the shore.
 - But instead...
 3. Consider what we are told in our text. Let it soak in to you.
 - Verse 39 says: **Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.**
 - This is phenomenal.
 - He did not merely keep them safe in the storm.
 - He brought the storm to a complete cessation by rebuking it.
 - It is one thing to command a demon—but now He is commanding the wind and the waves and they obey Him.
- B. The disciples' response is recorded in verse 41.
- **41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"**
1. Notice how it says that they feared exceedingly!
 - a. This was a different kind of fear than the fear of nature.
 - They were awestruck.
 - The fear of the storm was the kind of fear that makes you hot and energised... the kind that raises your blood pressure.
 - But this was the kind of fear that makes you cold and that makes your heart stop and your skin crawl.
 - It makes you tremble and fear exceedingly.
 - I remember reading this passage soon after my conversion.
 - I was in my dorm room in university and it was late at night and I read how Jesus commanded the wind and the waves and it struck me.
 - b. You realise that you are in the presence of that which is not a part of this creation.
 - You are before the One who made the world.
 - You are before the One who is not a part of this world.
 - You are before the One over which you have no control.
 - You are before the One who could wipe you out with a single word, or bless you forever with a single word.
 2. Part of you wants to run away and part of you wants to draw near.
 - He is terrifying, but He is also very attractive and appealing.
 - Like Moses at the burning bush, you are afraid, but you want to come near too... you cannot stay away.
 - That is how an encounter with divinity is.
- C. One day, we will all encounter the numinous.
1. At the Day of Judgment, He will command all the living and all the bodies who are in the graves as well as their spirits to come before Him.
 - He will appear in all of His majesty and glory.
 - We will be in awe before Him.

- And we will experience His authority and His power.
 - We will know that He is the one who can either curse us forever with one word, or bless us forever with one word.
 - We will know that we are incapable of challenging Him because He is the creator and we are the creature.
 - And He will speak.
 - To those on His left, He will say: **“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...”** and it will be so forever and ever.
 - And to those on His right, He will say: **“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...”** and it will be so forever and ever.
 - The numinous!
2. It behoves you to make peace with Him before that day comes.
- Recognise that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who came in our flesh.
 - He is one of us, yet He is divine.
 - He is this extraordinary combination of God and man because He came to save us from our sins.
 - He cares if we perish.
 - He cares very much.
 - He calls all people everywhere to come to Him for salvation.
 - He commands you to repent and believe the good news that He has come to save sinners and to gather them into His Father’s kingdom to live forever in glory with Him.
 - This one who speaks and the wind and waves obey is the same one who went to the cross to pay for our sins.
 - It is the only way for salvation to be procured for us without doing violence to holy justice.
 - And the only way to obtain that mercy is for you to humble yourself, repent of your sin, and come to Him to be saved.
 - We come to Him because we cannot save ourselves.
 - We come to Him in the storm, not just the storm at sea; but the storm that God Himself sent because of our sin...
 - And He commands the storm and it is quiet.
 - And we bow before Him as Lord forever.
 - He is more than a mere man—way more.
 - He is Deity.
 - And let me tell you, when you know Him as Saviour,
 - you have little reason to fear nature or to question whether He cares.
 - You see that He is over all things and you see that He has given Himself to save you.
 - You are not in a world of random storms or random anything.
 - You are in the world that He made and that He upholds.
 - You are here for Him, and He is for you.
 - Be still and know that He is God.
 - God is in His holy sanctuary. Let all the earth keep silent before Him.